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Vengeance Is Mine

Andrew Balfour

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"Up, Guards, and at them!"

VENGEANCE IS MINE

By ANDREW BALFOUR

AUTHOR OF "BY [illegible]"

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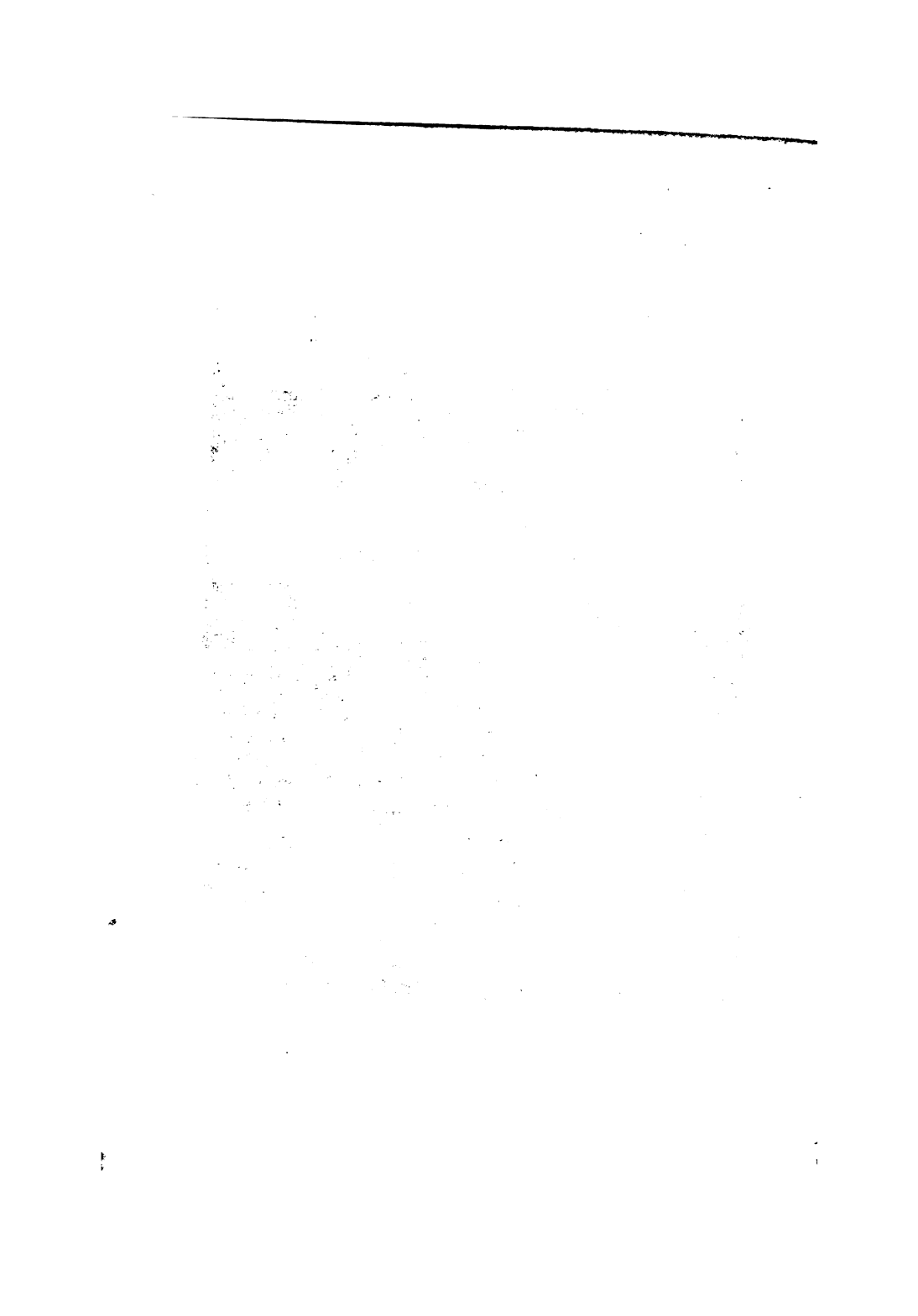

VENGEANCE IS MINE

By ANDREW BALFOUR

AUTHOR OF "BY STROKE OF SWORD," "TO ARMS."

Illustrations by JOHN HENDERSON BETTS, W. T. SMITH, AND R. CATON WOODVILLE

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TO

G. C.

IN MEMORY OF MANY A DAY ON MOOR

AND LOCH IN 'OOR AIN COUNTRIE'

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VENGEANCE IS MINE

BOOK I.

THE HOUSE OF DARROCH

CHAPTER I.

THE GATHERING

IT was the wildest storm that had visited the West Coast for many a year. It had come with the coming of night, and had increased in violence as the darkness fell. There was a heavy sea at the mouth of the Whipple water, but the fishermen of Shiachan were weather-wise, and their skiffs lay safely within the bar, but a few yards from the tiny hamlet.

Round the old house of Darroch the wind yelled and whistled like a fiend freed from bondage, and exulting madly in his liberty, and within, the lean recluse sat huddled over his fire of peat, and shivered in his great red-padded chair.

This night recalled just such another to Ian Darroch —the night when he had tricked the red-coats, and won back his inheritance. Since then he had kept it secure, at first by defiance, and then because the law had wearied of him and his ways, had forgotten him, and left him in peace. He was far from the bustling world in this lone place of sea and mountain-land,

but he was content—indeed, his life had been varied enough to make amends for any dulness and monotony at its fag-end. Proscribed and hunted after the '45, he had been captured and shipped to the plantations. He had known the lash in Barbadoes, and learned to hate the English with an undying hate; but he had taken his revenge. For many a year after his return his name was spoken of with awe amongst the islands and in every seaward parish of the adjacent mainland. It was an open secret that he had been in league with the wild wreckers of Pitlochie, the lawless men of the Black Glen, and it was whispered that even now he had dealings with their descendants, who were ever ready to take charge of a cargo when the Solway was watched too closely, who had many a still hidden away amongst the corries and the heather, and who were none too anxious to save the crew of a vessel driven from her course to meet her fate on the wild and barren coast which as cliff and reef bade defiance to the ocean's might.

But Ian Darroch was nearing his end. Hard and bony he had been all his life, and hard and bony he was in his senility.

A huge hound, gaunt and shaggy as his master, lay at his feet, and whimpered uneasily as the gale's eerie voice sang a storm-song about the gables and the sleet rattled on the coarse window-panes.

The old Jacobite was a mere wreck of his former self, thin and stooping, watery-eyed, with bleared vision and trembling limbs, but still fierce and bitter in temper, and caring for nothing on earth but the great dog Ossian and the younger of his two grandsons. They were all the kith and kin left to him, and the elder he hated as being the child of his son by the latter's first wife, an Englishwoman. He had driven the first Neil Darroch from his home on account of this marriage, and had never seen his face again, but in his old age he had been fain to welcome the second Neil, despite the fact that the

boy's mother was a Frenchwoman, one of that nation who had betrayed the Stuart cause, and whom he had cursed as faithless and corrupt. He had let the lad run wild, and filled his head with strange ideas foreign to the times, but Ian Darroch lived in the past, and would have it that things were as they had been when the White Rose blossomed for the last time. A curious whim took possession of him when he realized that the curly-headed little fellow in a kilt was little no longer, had attained years of discretion, and was growing restless and dissatisfied with his surroundings. He resolved that Neil Darroch should study the law with which he had been at enmity all his life. He would make others suffer as he had suffered, make his younger grandson an instrument to bully and browbeat hapless prisoners—a judge with the power of life and death, who might fine and imprison and hang without mercy, and make the name of Darroch a terror on the bench.

To this end he had parted with him, and the slow years had passed till now both his grandsons had been summoned to see him die. For the nonce, however, he had cheated the devil, and was able to leave his bed; but he was very lonely that night—sick and lonely. Strange visions framed themselves in the glowing embers. He saw faces of those long dead, gallant men who had taken pistol and claymore for the Prince. He saw again the slave-gangs and the long green stretches of the cane-fields under the fierce light of a tropic sun. He had been young then, hot-tempered and proud, but full of a yearning for home, for the kindly hills and the sound of the western surges as they beat monotonously on the Croban Point and the curving sands of the Bay of Shiachan. He had got his chance at last, and he had taken it and come up from the sea as an avenger of blood. This had been the great deed of his life, and the old man rarely conjured up his later years;

his dealings with the smugglers, his marriage, his wife's death, his bitter quarrel with his only son—all these he had forgotten, and his thoughts were away back to the wild night when he had seized Darroch House, and won a name for himself in every seaward parish. His mouth twitched, and he muttered and mumbled as memory after memory crowded on his feeble brain, as he planned and plotted once again, and led the way from the sea-caves by the light of the pine torches. It all came back to him as it had so often done, and then the vision passed, and left him wearied, but content; and so, spreading out his lean hands, all veins and knuckles, before the peat blaze, he smiled to himself, and, smiling, dropped into a doze.

Whatever else Ian Darroch might be, he was in keeping with his surroundings. The same could not be said of the three men who occupied the next room, and sat in silence listening to the sough of the wind without and its fitful roaring in the wide chimney, up which leaped the flames of a huge fire of wood. They were seated round the hearth of what out of courtesy was called the hall, a long, narrow chamber panelled in black oak, but bare and comfortless, with no claims to justify its high-sounding name save a venerable appearance and a fine arching fireplace of red and white stone. The most remarkable of the three was a man well past the middle age, whose thick hair, the colour of bleached seaweed, was gathered up into a queue, and fastened by a bow of faded yellow ribbon. His features were finely cut, his whole bearing distinguished at first sight, but a closer inspection revealed the fact that something was lacking in his face. His expression was pleasant, his dark eyes benevolent, but his thin lips were tremulous, his chin weak. He sat very stiffly on a straight-backed chair, and kept constantly smiling, as though well satisfied, and nodding aimlessly at the glow in front of him. His coat, which had originally

been of a good green cloth, was shabby in the extreme, his knee-breeches frayed and shiny, while his black silk stockings had been darned in many places with a coarse purple wool, which made his spidery shanks look as if covered with small nodosities or warts. A muffler round his neck, a shirt of doubtful linen, and a pair of carpet slippers of a gorgeous pattern completed a costume at once pathetic and ridiculous. And yet its owner had once been a man of fashion, a leader of the mode in a city where fashion is fashioned, so to speak.

Monsieur Deschamps had been born and bred a Parisian, one of an old Huguenot family; but, unfortunately for himself, his connections were aristocratic and his ideas conservative. He had by a marvellous series of escapes saved his neck at the time of the Terror, but only at the expense of his reason. He would never again be the keen and alert young dandy who had practised bows and soft speeches, and been always ready to take up an affair of honour, whatever the weapon, knowing himself to be equally expert with pistol and small sword. He would now in all probability continue as he had been for years, a very polite old gentleman, eccentric in his dress and manners, but perfectly harmless and extremely contented with his lot.

It had been no hardship for him to accompany his only sister, wife and then widow of a British naval officer, to this outlandish place on the Scottish West Coast. He imagined it an excellent change of air, and peopled the lonely spot with visionary beings whose conversation was much to his liking, in whom he confided, and with whom he shared many a secret. The gentle Frenchwoman soon drooped and died, scared out of her life, so said report, by Ian Darroch's grimness and ferocity; but there remained the child, and Monsieur Deschamps told him as many tales as did the old Jacobite, and divided Neil's affections with his grandfather.

He was if anything a little elated, for his protégé had returned after a long absence, and he had not yet detected any remarkable change in him. They would renew their walks, and he would no longer have the old housekeeper as his sole society. The woman was well enough, but no companion; while there never had been the least cordiality in the relations of Charles Deschamps and Ian Darroch. So the former, like the latter, sat quietly, his face wrinkling with complacent smiles all on account of the young man who was seated on his right, and who little imagined what awaited him in the near future.

Neil Darroch, as a man, was very different from what he had been as a boy, at least, to the casual observer. In the days when he had lived a half-savage existence, save for the gentle restraint of his uncle, he had been a creature of moods, but for the most part a dreamy, sensitive lad, whose surroundings had done much to shape his character. The loneliness and grandeur of the spot appealed to his imagination. The heather-clad hills, purple-breasted in autumn, crowned by ridges of black peat-hagg, and gashed by birch and rowan-lined gullies, the home of the wily blackcock and the grey hen, he regarded as emblems of his country and his people.

He had waded among the long green reeds and scared the teal and mallard from their nests. He had wandered by the cold, bleak shore and watched the wave-ripples spreading out upon the firm yellow sand and curling round the lug-worms' casts. He had heard the cry of the snowy owl as it hooted in the coppices of Darroch, and was answered by the harsh note of the night-fishing heron. He knew the long coast-line from the rocky Croban Point in the south, past the wide bay of Shiachan to the long line of northern cliffs, cave-pierced, high and beetling, a coast-line fringed with floating wrack and the broken edge of the ceaseless ocean swell.

The spirit of the place had entered into him, and many a time he had been stirred to his inmost depths by the sound of the wailing pipes in Pitlochie, carried by the hill air down to Darroch, the plaintive rise and fall mingling with the rustle of the larch boughs and the whispering voice of night.

Little did he know how it was to influence him in after life, but with such a nature, with his grandfather's wild tales ringing in his ears of nights, it was no wonder that Neil Darroch had grown up a violent Jacobite and passionately attached to the dreary house which was his home. And yet, as was but natural, the time had come when he longed to quit it, and he had been ready enough to do Ian Darroch's bidding, and go to Edinburgh to study law. His only grief had been leaving the stately old Frenchman, who had done his best to make a scholar of the untutored and ignorant youth, whom he had crammed with facts regarding the history of his mother's country and wearied with his quaint maxims and confused and rambling stories on all kinds of odd subjects.

Never, perhaps, did a youth start upon his city life more handicapped than did Neil Darroch. Not that money was altogether lacking: his allowance was small indeed, but enough to keep together the body and soul of a frugal law clerk. It was in knowledge of the world and its crooked ways that Neil was so woefully deficient. He had scarcely a conception of what he was about to face, his ideas being taken from his grandfather's tales of a vanished past and his uncle's hazy and exaggerated accounts of a society which had been swept away and scattered over every land. He was a man in body—ay, and in brain power—but in experience a mere babe.

Bitterly had he paid for his innocence. In those days the Scottish capital was none too virtuous. Its lower classes were rough and dissolute, its upper too often drunken and coarse. It was a bad school for

a raw lad with the evil blood of an Ian Darroch in him.

At first, bewildered and amazed, he had held aloof, shy and retiring; then, gaining confidence and ill-advisers, he had gone gaily on the road to ruin, but he stopped in time. He himself could not have told what it was that arrested his erring steps, but the change was sudden. He commenced to work in dead earnest; he shunned his late companions, but made no other friends. He crept back into the shell of reserve from which he had emerged, but he was no longer in danger. He had gained knowledge, which to some is power, to some salvation, to many ruin. To Neil Darroch, destined for the law, it might prove advantageous, but it affected him unpleasantly. Lonely, self-conscious, and with a pride which was not conceit, he gradually developed into a peculiar sort of man. He became that strange but interesting type, the youthful cynic, and cultivated tricks of speech and gestures which were amusing to others, who did not guess that they were assumed to hide a nervous temperament.

He seemed all at once to have grown old; he acquired a slight stoop, and fondly imagined himself a character. There were many such in his profession, but they were elderly men, who had earned a right to be eccentric if they chose, and by the time Neil Darroch had worked his way into a small practice at the Bar, he found himself no favourite with his contemporaries. But they could not deny his talents. So caustic was his tongue, that he earned for himself the name of 'Young Colocynth.'

Men predicted a future for him, but he shocked several who might have aided him by his views on social and religious questions. He professed an ardent admiration for the genius which had brought France out of chaos, and placed her at the head of the civilized world; and yet he kept his semi-French

origin a close secret. He had clever, if somewhat shallow, views about most of the pressing questions of the day, and when in the humour could argue fluently and well.

As the years passed he almost forgot the wild, outlandish place which was his home, where two old men, the very opposites of each other, yearned for a sight of the quiet, affectionate lad who had brightened their lives, but would not beg his return —the one because he was too proud, the other because he feared to injure his nephew's chances of success. Neil wrote short letters, and in return received sheets of underlined words ending in queer flourishes from Monsieur Deschamps, and curt notes from the Glasgow firm who were Ian Darroch's legal advisers; but it never occurred to him that his appearance at Shiachan would be welcome.

One day, however, a message had come, and with something akin to remorse the cut-and-dry advocate had started by coach from the White Hart in the Grassmarket, leaving his clients to fend for themselves. And now he was back in the hall again, and realizing what a totally different being he had become since the smack from Portroy, the nearest township, had borne him off to make his mark, and become the hanging judge of his grandfather's lurid imagination.

A tall, thin man, but possessed of the wiry strength which goes further than mass and weight, his face distinctly handsome, his complexion dark, his expression dignified, he fidgets with a quizzing glass, dangling by a broad riband, and studies the face of his unknown step-brother Geoffrey.

Neil Darroch had developed into a mixture of his grandfather and his uncle, and the result was curiously like a certain class of Englishman, though this he himself would have been the first to deny and repudiate; for under all his cloak of cold reserve there still lay those fixed beliefs which had been

instilled into him from infancy, while the wild blood of the clan Darroch coursed hotly through his veins.

Geoffrey Darroch was no more the kind of man one would expect to meet in such a place than were his companions. He had inherited money from his mother, and put it to a bad use. An Englishman to all intents and purposes—he was a Londoner of the time of the Regency—a man of fashion, with disreputable habits and an engaging face and figure, broad-shouldered, inclined to stoutness, full of a low cunning and greedy of gain, his was not a pleasant record. 'A handsome blackguard' would have summed him up concisely and fitly, though it must be confessed his faults were largely those of heredity and environment. The wild strain was in him also, and pleasure ready at his hand, while from his mother's side had come good looks and a gouty constitution. He had never been taught to curb his passions; he was easy-going as long as things went well with him, but his character was that dangerous combination of weakness and tendency to vice which has brought many a man to the gallows. What had brought him to Darroch House was the fact that he had made his own haunts a little too hot for himself, and considered discretion the better part of valour.

He was the heir to an estate he had never seen till the day before our tale begins, and with which he was already disgusted; but his circumstances just then were embarrassed, and he had hoped, knowing nothing of the place, that there was something to be got out of it; so that now he made one of the three men who hearkened to the turmoil of the western gale, and caught every now and then the harsh, hacking cough of the lean recluse whose near approach to death had thrown them together.

And out upon the black waste of waters staggered a ship, in whose ragged shrouds the wind sang a song of destruction, coming sure and fast.

CHAPTER II.

THE MERCHANTMAN

AT the head of the Black Glen lay the crofts of Pitlochie, hidden away in a nook amongst the hills, where the Whipple was a mere thread, dyed brown with the moss-water, where the dark tarn nestled at the base of a mighty mountain spur, and where often in summer-time no sound might be heard the live-long day but the plaintive bleat of sheep, the melancholy whistle of the curlew, the drumming of solitary snipe, and the harsh, barking croak of the ravens from the rock corries.

For then man, woman and child would be off to the stills in bleak Glen Molachan, unless indeed there had been work in the night to keep them all abed—a lugger scared from the Solway mouth ready to run a cargo where there was little risk of discovery.

Now, however, the Pitlochie men were at their cottage doors. The night had passed, but the storm still raged, and they watched the scudding streamers of mist which swept along the hill crests, and marked the effects of the blast on the few and stunted firs which had struggled for existence on those bare uplands. But a half-dozen remained, and even those showed long white scars, where branches had been rent from the parent stems, and now, ragged and forlorn, they were swaying and bending like drunken things, while the mournful swish of the wind through their dark needle clusters sounded like a weird hill music, a dirge of death.

As one of them was at last uprooted and crashed to mother earth after a gallant fight and much loss of top hamper, there suddenly reached the onlookers another signal of death and destruction. It had cleared, but the whistling gusts were as violent as

ever, whirling the snow-drifts into clouds of fine, feathery particles, which drove along the hillsides with the speed of flying birds. The whole glen was full of sound, but there came a lull, a pause, as of momentary exhaustion, and with it a faint, distant boom, distinct and separate for an instant, and then whisked away on a shrieking blast, which tore the thatch of an outhouse into fragments.

It was a signal known and loved by this lawless community, and at its summons man after man caught up his stick and bonnet and took the moorland path which led to the shore and the Caves of Cowrie. It was one long battle with gasping breaths and straining limbs all the way across the heather, the salt spray flying inland and stinging against their faces, a feeling all the time as if they were striving against some invisible water current of vast depth and strength; but at last, breathless and exhausted, they reached the cliff edge, and threw themselves down, gripping the coarse grass and the bracken stems, and gazing out to sea.

The day had cleared, and all over the ocean there was a curious, fresh, greenish light, a sort of airiness and transparency, as is sometimes seen the morning after a heavy winter's gale; but here the gale was still raging, in spite of the cold, bright sky, and the absence of mist or driving sleet. The sea itself was a brilliant green, a mass of vast, surging waves roaring shorewards, with tossing plumes and a skirmishing advance cloud of scud and spray.

Close to the beach, a little of which still showed, the mighty rollers came in with a rush, curling and better curling, white lines of foam streaming backwards along their smooth and curving backs, till, overbalancing, they thundered down upon the sand and pebbles and back-flow. And then up would shoot a deluge of spume, while a rush of creamy froth slithered greedily onwards towards the cliff base, only to be sucked seawards and overwhelmed

by the next towering water wall as it fell and burst. North and south in an almost unbroken line the charging mountainous seas wreaked their fury upon the shifting foreground, almost unbroken, for in one part a row of peaked, wrack-clad rocks, showing in line like the back ridge of an alligator, broke the force of these ocean giants. They formed a sort of natural breakwater, within which the sea was only gently ruffled, although the wind-blown crests of the great waves without came down in showers upon it like huge pearl-drops.

The dreaded Skerries, a mile off shore, low-lying, like hidden traps, at the best of times, were now buried beneath a constant streak of broken water, a wild jabble of foam, which showed away out to sea on either side of the Stacks. These latter, two in number, were like sharp black teeth, rocks such as may be seen off the Iles D'Hyères, near Toulon, miniature Pitons of St. Lucia, small pyramids jutting upwards from the waste around. A narrow, a very narrow, channel separated one from the other, and there the water was of great depth, but on the outer side of either fang lay the Skerries, north and south, as they were named upon the chart.

Surrounded by a network of currents and tiny whirlpools, they were dreaded by both fishermen and mariners, and loved only by the restless herring-gulls and wild sea-mews, which in calm weather congregated about them in myriads, and rent the air with their discordant cries. But there was no bird-life on the Skerries that day, and the Stacks were being bombarded by billow after billow, some sweeping clear over their forty feet of weathered basalt, while others caught them half-way up in their chill embrace, and yet others, their bases broken, swept and washed about them in broad, white, bubbling tracts, as though baffled in their efforts to outdo their mightier brethren.

But the men of Pitlochie had no eyes for such a

scene of wild grandeur. That which caused them to stare intently into the eye of the wind was the sight of a ship away beyond the outlying rocks and reefs. With nothing showing but a tiny spread of foresail and a small jib, with broken stumps in place of main and mizzen masts, with foretopmast and bowsprit end gone, and a heap of floating wreckage clinging to her leeward side, a great barque was striving to beat off shore.

Through the glass one could mark how she lifted to the seas and lurched with a stagger into the furrows, how some of the larger billows swept in torrents over her decks, threatening to engulph her altogether. Her guns had ceased firing, her crew were clustered like clinging bees in the fore-rigging, save two figures which were lashed to the wheel. Not a rag of bunting betrayed her nationality, but she was plainly a merchantman, and as plainly a merchantman doomed.

'A furriner,' growled a grizzled, evil-faced man, whose roving life had come to an anchorage in the Black Glen; 'a furriner and——' He ended with a string of foul oaths, for he had caught sight of a band of men coming along the cliff-tops from the direction of the fishing village.

His companions paid no heed to his blasphemies. A fresh gust of wind had blinded them for a moment, so pungent was the salt splutter which struck upon their eyeballs. When next they looked seawards there was enough to engross their whole attention. The men on deck had vanished, the vessel had relinquished her desperate struggle, but in her vain beat for life she had come opposite the channel between the Stacks. And now, as they watched her, she swung round, bow on to the shore, was caught on the breast of a huge wave, and hurled like a plaything of the rollers towards the rocks. Then suddenly she vanished in the trough, only to be again caught up and again to vanish, nearer than ever to her fate.

A shout burst from the smugglers, for once again the black form of the ship showed upon a wave-top, with a smother of foam all about her. On she came, till she seemed balanced half-way up between the mighty teeth, and, tossing on the wind, a wild cry was born to the shore. Then the wave surged forward alone, and there, gripped by the rocks, stuck fast between the deadly Stacks, with broken water pouring over her in cascades, and dripping down upon her from above, hung the poor barque, her nose dipping low, her stern tilted high, and her streaming decks showing in their full length and breadth.

At the sight a chorus of angry curses burst from the men of Pitlochie. Their prey had escaped them. Well did they know the run of the currents and the faint chance there was of any cargo drifting to the beach once the Stacks or Skerries had gripped a hapless ship. They started to their feet and shook their fists at the wreck, then cursed again, as they became aware of the presence of a dozen men who had halted some twenty yards away.

These were the fishermen of Shiachan, and at their head were the grandsons of Ian Darroch. Word had been brought of the minute-guns, and Neil, a favourite in the old days with the big burly men of bronzed faces and horny hands, had organized a rescue party, which at the last moment Geoffrey Darroch had asked leave to join. They carried several coils of rope and lighter lines, but Neil, who knew that for long there had been bad blood between the fisher-folk and the smugglers, was a trifle put out at the latter's appearance. He began to see trouble ahead, and halted his men to consider what best could be done. Meanwhile the barque's foremast broke across some six feet above deck-level, and fell upon her port-bow, taking most of her crew with it, and flinging half a dozen of them into the sea, where they were swallowed up in a few seconds of time.

'She'll break up in a minute or two, I fancy,' Neil shouted into the ear of the man next him.

But the latter shook his head, and pointed away to the horizon. There was clear evidence that the gale was breaking; it was not to last another day. Curious streaks of a brighter light than the sky held stretched in long lines from north to south, and a glimmering of sunlight was struggling to display itself—a cold, wintry gleam which had nothing of cheerfulness about it. The force of the blast was lessening, while already the waves were scarce so huge as they had been.

There might yet be a chance of saving the unhappy creatures on the wreck. The tide was only making, and the sea had not yet reached the cliff-base, so that it was possible to launch a boat under shelter of the long reef. But, supposing a boat could live in such weather, where was it to be got? There was no sign of any craft upon the beach. All at once Neil remembered the caves. It was probable, indeed almost certain, that some kind of boat lay concealed in one or other of them. But how were they to be reached?

He was but little acquainted with this part of the coast-line, for as a boy the fear of the free-traders had been upon him, and Ian Darroch's tales had not encouraged him to seek an acquaintance with the men of Pitlochie. At the same time, he knew that there must be some secret passage leading to the caves from the cliff-tops, the cliffs themselves, though not a hundred feet in height, being very steep and pathless. He had heard of such entrances on the East Coast—long sloping tunnels with concealed mouths, half natural, half artificial. Whatever was done would, however, have to be done very quickly. No boat could be launched once the rollers began to plunge into the rock recesses, while every moment was lessening the number of the black figures clinging to mast-stumps or bulwarks, and every now and then

there came floating shorewards the mournful wail of some poor wretch going down to feed the crabs and cod and conger, or to drift in time, a disfigured, swollen horror, upon the wave-beat shingle.

From what the excited fishermen said amongst themselves, Neil gathered that the smugglers had a large boat, buoyed with empty barrels, which they used in a rough sea, and that if she was forthcoming his men were willing to make an attempt at rescue. He resolved that it should be made.

'Yonder fellows are difficult to handle,' he said to Geoffrey, nodding towards the free-traders, 'but I suppose I can count on your support?'

'To tell the truth, Mr. Darroch,' was the reply, 'it seems to me a hopeless business, and scarcely worth the risk of making enemies of those men. They may be my neighbours before long.'

'And to conciliate a set of rogues you would let a ship's company, with perhaps women amongst them, drown before your eyes! Shame on you, sir!' sneered Neil, his natural coolness all but deserting him for a moment. 'Come along, men,' he added. 'We, at any rate, must do our best.'

Geoffrey Darroch made no answer to Neil's scornful words, but he was none the less enraged. He made up his mind there and then that this 'whelp of a Frenchman,' as he called his step-brother, would yet suffer for his insolence, and in high dudgeon he turned his back, and set off the way he had come.

The which more than one of the men of Pitlochie noted with a lively satisfaction, for this fine-looking gentleman could be none other than the future Darroch of Darroch.

It encouraged them in their spirit of resistance, and Neil's demand for a guide to the caves was met by a sullen refusal. It was no time for words, and as he was determined to use force if need be, and the fishermen were ready to back him, things might have

taken a serious turn had not the air been suddenly filled with a sullen booming sound, like distant thunder.

The sea had reached the rocks, and the great waves were plunging one after another with reverberating roar into the dark mouths of the Caves of Cowrie.

'It will be no good now, sir,' said old Tosh, a gray-headed veteran whose word carried weight; 'and, moreover, she's near through with it.'

'Ay, that's so,' said another; 'but curse them for black-hearted cowards!'

A change had come over the barque. Although the gale, quick to come, was quick to go, and although the breakers were changing into rollers without ragged, broken crests, the sea had done its fell work. The ship had slipped downwards. She was again on a level keel, and had neared the white race of waters from which the waves sprang at her greedy and hissing. She was grinding out her bottom against the Stacks—grinding with split and shattered planks. All sign of life had vanished from her decks; she was a mere shapeless hulk. Her end was not long in coming. Three mighty billows followed one another, as is their wont, in rapid succession. Their combined onslaught was too much for the hapless ship. The first loosened her hold of the Stacks, the second drove up her stern till once more a glimpse could be had of her decks—a glimpse only, for the third, roaring as if in triumph, went rushing over her in a green cataract, edged and streaked by white foam and spray; and when it passed, the barque had passed also, had lurched and dived and sunk to meet the rotting ribs and rusted ordnance which lay on the sea-bottom about the Stacks and Skerries as bones and carcases lie about an eagle's eyrie or a wild beast's den.

The last trace of the merchantman was gone.

CHAPTER III.

THE CORPSE

HARD upon the storm came a white frost. There was a silvery coating of rime on every grass-blade, a stillness all over the glen and round the house of Darroch, whose leaden turrets gleamed white through the morning's mist. The birds sat still and ruffled in the coppices, a suspicion of ice had gathered at the burn's side. About the Stacks and Skerries the sea sobbed heavily, as a child sobs after a fit of anger. As the hours passed the sun made his presence felt, and the day brightened, but brought no relief to Neil Darroch. He was restless and annoyed.

Although there had been no open breach of the peace, he knew that the smugglers looked on him with suspicion, and might yet prove troublesome. For that he cared little, but his stepbrother's behaviour irritated and angered him. Geoffrey Darroch had met him with black looks on his return, and though Monsieur Deschamps, pleased at having company, had been lively and amusing for a time, his efforts had failed to dissipate the cloud which, though small as a man's hand, had already begun to gather. The old Frenchman could not understand what had occurred, and fearing he was in some way to blame, became timid and out of humour.

Things were no better on the morrow. Neil did not feel called upon to apologize. This brother of his was not at all to his liking, and though, with Ian Darroch worse, and the shadow of death hovering near, he felt that any quarrel was unseemly, he was determined to make no advances till Geoffrey had explained his conduct of the previous day. 'The man does not look a coward,' he told himself, 'but his action was tantamount to an insult,' and

Monsieur Deschamps, whom he took into his confidence, entirely agreed with him.

'I like him not, my boy,' said the old man. 'Already he sits in the best chair, and speaks as if he were the master. I have caught him laughing at me —at me, Charles Deschamps; but let him beware! I have seen a better man quail beneath my eye. Oh yes, there was'—and he rambled away upon some pet story of his early days, while Neil smiled at his vehemence and threats. It was a new thing for Monsieur Deschamps to show such spirit.

'Never mind him,' he answered. 'We'll both go off together and see how town life suits you.'

'Ha! but that will be grand,' said the old fellow, with a gleam in his faded eyes. 'It grows dull here, though the air is pleasant. Still, my health, I think, is sufficiently restored, and there is no reason to stay longer.'

This was ever his idea, that he was merely recruiting, and would ere long return to his gaieties and beloved Paris. Those terrible days when his life hung by a thread and his brain became unhinged were mercifully blotted out, and as a rule Monsieur Deschamp's chatter was of the cheeriest. He was, however, readily influenced by his surroundings, and was always at his best in the long summer days, when he would wander out to have a chat with the fisher-wives and play with the bairns. In the winter it was otherwise. He would sit, hour in, hour out, before the hall fire, mournfully shaking his head, and letting tears course down his puckered cheeks. Such a fit came upon him now, and Geoffrey Darroch having locked himself into his own room, Neil, to whom inaction was a thing unbearable, sallied out, and took his way towards the mouth of the Whipple, a tidal stream with a bar of silted sand at its mouth and a carpeting of green weed at the ebb. He came upon the cobble which served as a ferry for the bait-gatherers, and a few strokes

carried him across the channel, the water being low, and running rapidly out. He landed, and walking across a stretch of links dotted with brown-tipped, prickly whin-clumps, which in spring were masses of golden yellow, he reached the great sweep of sands which bounded the bay of Shiachan from the river's mouth to the rocky, sea-bird-spotted Croban, towards which he saw a scart speeding with low and rapid flight—an evil-looking bird, so black its colour, so strange its shape, long-necked and long-winged, silent and solitary. Like all thoughtful men, Neil Darroch found a real pleasure in Nature, and nowhere more than on the beach. The dead star-fish, the empty, spineless case of the urchin, the mottled razor-shells, forced open and polished clean, all told him a story—the great tragedy of the survival of the fittest. The birds were busy playing in it, unconscious actors; the very weed masses were full of sand-beetles and minute crabs, taking minor parts, and as much else as they could get. Winter in some ways is the best time on the shore. There is more wild life in the short days, there is more drift from the angry seas and the high tides, and there is often a strange beauty in a frosty evening on a deserted strand, in the setting of a crimson sun away out upon a cold, gray ocean, in the vague melancholy of a vast water stretch, drab and dull, and beating sorrowfully upon a lonely length of salt sea sand.

He sauntered along, wondering if he would have to remain beyond the week or ten days which he had allowed himself. His grandfather was worse, and only half-conscious, and he sorrowed for the old man whose life had been so loveless and sad.

'Strange,' he muttered, 'that he who hates the English, and with good cause, should be succeeded by one who has no sympathy with him, though, if I am not mistaken, he has his vices. It looks as though he meant to encourage those rogues of

smugglers, though for what reason it would be hard to tell. God knows what has brought him here at all. He might have had things arranged in Glasgow, or even in his beloved London for that matter, and spared us his presence at such a time.'

He turned, and away out to sea, to the north, beyond the bluff headland, at whose base coursed the Whipple, he could see the southern Stack rising sentinel-like against the sky.

A thought struck him. It was calm, and there would be light for a couple of hours. Why should he not pay a visit to the scene of the shipwreck? Retracing his steps, he again crossed in the cobble, and in a cove amongst the rocks found a boat, which he had no difficulty in launching. There were oars and a baling-dish in her, and without more ado he started off. Had he been wise, he would have asked old Tosh's advice before venturing; for the day had changed, the frost no longer held the air, it had grown raw, and a faint sea-breeze laden with moisture was coming in puffs from the north-west. Still, it only sufficed to ripple the smooth surface of the heavy swell, which scarcely impeded him as he pulled steadily along half a mile off shore. He did not notice the sea-fog creeping up, for the mass of the Stacks hid it from him as he drew close to them. The birds on the Skerries were uneasy, shifting here and there, and screaming harshly as the falling tide left bare some savoury tit-bit. Very vast and forbidding looked the huge, irregular pyramids of rock, slimy and wet, a full ten feet above the gurgling gray sea which sucked at them. But Neil had no time to view them just then. The boat demanded all his attention; for the strong, deep currents had it in their grip, and tended to whirl it this way and that, to spin it like a teetotum, and it needed a long swing and a heavy tug to keep her nose straight. He had been here before, otherwise he would not have ventured, for the water jabble was like a trap, like a

liquid maze, bewildering and deadly, and even on the land side a tract of foam formed a setting for the wreck-feathered Skerries. As it was, he found himself in the channel between the Stacks where the ill-fated barque had stuck fast till she was swept to her doom.

At the ebb there was a curve in the narrow passage which broke the force of the ocean heave that came lapping in between the black walls of basalt, and so, though the water strip was streaked with white, it was comparatively calm. Neil was breathing hard as he forced the boat into the chasm, and he rested a little, fending himself from the slippery rock as he drifted towards it.

As he thus lay, dipping and splashing, the sea-fog, salt and stealthy, began to close about him. Almost before he realized its presence it had wrapped him round. Forty feet above him the Stack top rose clear from its shredding streamers, but on the water surface it lay thick, yet lightly, rolling gently past him and shrouding his view at the distance of a few yards. He began to grow alarmed. The birds had ceased their clamour, and all was dead silent, save for the suck and drip of the sea and the monotonous splash, splash of the boat's bow. It was impossible for him to find his way back in safety while the fog lasted.

He sat, oars in hand, on one of the thwarts, his thick topcoat buttoned closely round his throat, and waited. Presently, to his relief, a rift showed in the vapour curtain. He got a glimpse of the northern Stack, and at the same moment something white caught his eye. It startled him, but vanished again as a fresh curl of fog drifted past. He thought of the ship's crew who lay fathoms deep beneath his boat's keel. He shivered a little, and wondered what it was he had seen against the black rock. Once more the fog cleared, and he looked anxiously at the spot. The white object was still there, but a

second later he laughed at his fears. It was a great white gull, perched on a rounded block—but, stay! Was that a rock upon which its webbed and yellow feet rested? Neil stared at it, as its outline grew more definite, and a vague horror took hold of him.

It was the face of a man, and the bird sat upon his skull!

The thing was hideous, a head without a body, black as the rock itself. Almost involuntarily Neil uttered a cry of dismay, and the bird lazily spread its wings and launched itself into the mist which was gathering again, but gathering only to pass quickly.

He had not been deceived. What he saw was the head of a negro, the blanched lips shrunken, and revealing a double row of grinning teeth, the eyes half closed, the huge ears spreading like wings on either side. It was like a gargoyle, motionless and weird.

He approached closer, and as he did so noticed that the full-tide mark was several feet above this ghastly relic of the wreck.

In the drowned the face is the first part which suffers, but there had been no time for disfiguration here. It was wonderfully life-like. He half expected to see the eyelids wink and the grin expand. The negro looked as if smiling to himself.

It was only when Neil had run his boat up to the base of the rock that the mystery was explained. The man was fixed up to the chin in a great vertical cleft. It was possible to land on a narrow ledge, and Neil, overcoming his natural repugnance, scrambled ashore, taking the boat's painter with him. This he made fast round a little pinnacle of the rock, and then climbed carefully upwards till he was on a level with the mouth of the crevice.

The cleft was narrow; no doubt the body had been sucked into it, and had been caught beneath

the chin. The neck rested in a groove with sharp edges. The trunk, short but stoutly built, hung suspended in the fissure, which, though not wide, was deep. The sea was disintegrating the base of the northern Stack. The miniature chasm was free of water, there being cracks in its outer wall, through which the sea drained. Its bottom would have been visible but for what it held in the shape of driftwood. It was a veritable trap.

Now that Neil had solved the mystery, the feeling of dread which had possessed him passed away. For a moment he thought of carrying the body ashore; but the idea was repulsive, and it would serve no purpose. The negro was clad in a loose shirt and duck trousers. All that could be done was to search him for some clue as to what vessel this was which had met an untimely fate, and then to commit his body to the deep, to complete the ship's company which it would seem he had striven hard to leave.

Neil's footing was too uncertain to allow him to drag the body free, and so, without a second thought, he slipped down into the crevice, and began hastily to turn out the man's pockets. As he did so, a fresh wreath of fog came swirling past, and had it not been that he could hear his boat splashing briskly below him, he might have imagined himself cut off from the shore, for he could see nothing of the water channel.

But as he completed his fruitless search, another sound caught his ears: a creaking as of wood on wood, and then the unmistakable dip of oars. He was not alone; he held his breath, and listened intently. There came a murmur of voices from somewhere in the mist, and then again the creak of oars in rowlocks. His height was such that, standing erect, he could look over the edge of the rock-cleft; but there was nothing to be seen—everything was shrouded from his view.

He had no doubt, however, as to the cause of these noises. The smugglers, like himself, had seen fit to pay a visit to the Stacks. He cursed the stupidity which had made him forget the likelihood of such an occurrence, but there was no help for it now. Already the fog was thinning, and his boat would be discovered. There was no doubt he was in danger. Only the day before he had defied these very men, and threatened them, while he knew that they would regard his presence on the Stacks as an act of trespass. They did not stick at trifles, and would think nothing of holding him to ransom, even if they did not knock him on the head.

The whole history of the gang was peculiar. Their origin dated back to the year 1754. In that year Ian Darroch returned home, the leader of a set of desperadoes who along with him escaped from Barbadoes. They had sailed in a small craft, but it was a fair-sized brig which one dark night came to grief upon the Skerries, and left her bones there. A boat-load had managed to reach the shore at the Caves of Cowrie, and with them had come a few wretched women, who had been offered marriage by lot, with, as an alternative, death, and worse than death.

In those days Darroch House was held by a garrison. It was a convenient spot from which to overawe a part of the country then more populous, and which had not been backward in proclaiming for the exiled House of Stuart. What happened was never fully known, but certain it is that one night the red-coats fled in terror to Portroy, and flatly refused to return to a place which they said was full of devils. Nothing more could be learned from the soldiers, except that there had been neither violence nor bloodshed. Even their officers, who had been absent at the time, could do nothing with them, but having braved a night in the house, they also returned half scared out of their wits.

The years passed, and long after all danger of a rising was over a rumour went abroad that someone was living in Darroch House, while a tale was told of a gang of wreckers in the Black Glen. These, however, kept to themselves, and when it was found that amongst them were men who had been shipped into slavery eight years before, and when it was whispered that the lonely man in Darroch House was the laird himself, there were few who would earn blood-money by giving information to the Government. One such there was, but he vanished mysteriously on his way to the sheriff, and when proceedings were threatened at a later period men still told how, in broad daylight, a band of swarthy smugglers, headed by a blind piper, entered Portroy, and vowed to burn every house in it if they were not left in peace. There had been little trouble after this.

Ian Darroch was said to rule his wild followers with an iron hand, and while they took what the sea gave, and while from a dozen wrecks no living being emerged to tell the tale, there were till recently no complaints on the part of those who were neighbours to the men of Pitlochie.

Time wrought changes. A fishing village sprang up at Shiachan. Ian Darroch was absent for a week, and brought home a wife, who, happily for herself, died in giving birth to a son. The son grew to manhood, would have nothing to do with his father's methods of life, went off in a revenue cutter, and returned with an English bride, only to have the door slammed in his face, and to be cursed and threatened. Trouble and want had come upon this Neil Darroch, despite his wife's prospects, and, after her death, leaving his son Geoffrey, he entered the navy before the mast. When a petty officer he had married a beautiful French girl, taken prisoner on a West Indiaman from Guadaloupe. As a lieutenant, rising rapidly to fame, he had fallen in

a cutting-out expedition at the mouth of the Loire, and we know what became of his widow and children.

Only two of the original band who had escaped from the brig now remained: Ian Darroch, nearly a hundred years of age, despite his drunken habits, but tottering at last to the grave, and Dugald, the blind piper, who had been a boy of fifteen when he saw Culloden fought, but whose youth had not saved him from the lash of the overseer and the brand of the slave. But though a score of mossy stones marked the resting-places of the old wreckers, their descendants still lived by themselves, a peculiar people, occasionally reinforced by some wanderer who found here congenial company, provided he underwent successfully the searching examination to which he was subjected by the old Laird of Darroch. The place was so remote that the authorities found no reason for meddling with this colony, whom many believed to be gipsies, for already the story of their coming was being forgotten.

But Neil Darroch knew it, and, with the exception of Dugald, the blind piper, he hated the whole crew, whom he felt certain were kept in check merely by his grandfather's presence. Dugald he had been taught to regard as a patriot and a martyr, and the old Highlander, who, before rheumatism crippled him, was frequently at Darroch House, had taken a liking to the lad and made much of him, while Neil could wheedle a tune out of him when no one else, not even Ian Darroch, could get him to finger the pipes.

According to him, the present smugglers were very different from those of his time, who, except for 'ta Sassenachs,' were honest lads, who could never get enough from the Government for what they had suffered, though, please God, they would do their best.

This Neil Darroch was ready enough to believe,

but those who were approaching through the mist were a set of hard-drinking rogues, who more than once had come to loggerheads with the fisher-folk, and even with the Portroy people, and whom even Ian Darroch could not always control.

'The only thing to do,' Neil thought, 'is to frighten the villains and then slip round to the sea cave and hide there; but how?'

A moment more and his boat would be discovered. They were drawing near. As they approached closer their gruff voices sounded weirdly loud, hemmed in as they were by the walls of rock on either side, and it was this that brought an idea into his head.

He waited till he could dimly see a dark shape below him, and then he crouched down in the crevice beside the body of the negro. The black head fixed in its niche had scared him. Why, then, should it not scare the new-comers, especially if he was there to aid it? The action he felt to be undignified, the trick that of a schoolboy, but it was no time to hesitate, and there was a grim humour in the thought. Raising his voice till it rang out in a wailing shriek, he began a series of cries, which echoed and re-echoed, and were answered by the clamour of affrighted sea-birds on the Skerries. He paused, and he could tell at once that they had taken effect. The voices had ceased. A waft of wind swept lazily through the passage, and drove the fog wreath before it.

As it did so he began again, imitating as best he could the laughter of a maniac. He was himself surprised to find how eerie and awe-inspiring it sounded—a shrill, long-drawn laughter, pealing out into the salt sea mist, tuneless and horrible. He almost shivered as he listened to its notes, and heard it answered by the harsh and yet plaintive yammering of the herring-gulls. But there was more to follow. As once again he commenced his

outcry, there came a shout of terror and dismay, a confused jabbering in the mixed English and Gaelic of the free-traders, and then the hurried splash of oars growing rapidly fainter and dying away.

'Thank God!' muttered Neil to himself, yet could not restrain a dry chuckle as he looked over the edge of the rock-cleft. The channel was clear; his ruse had succeeded better than he had hoped, but it was far from improbable that the smugglers would return.

He knew that on the sea face of the Stack there was a cavern which could be entered even at high tide, a great arched grotto lined with basaltic columns, and formed, not by the action of waves and wind, but by the same volcanic disturbance which had heaved up both Stacks and Skerries. It was the home of a colony of rock-pigeons, being full of ledges on which they nested in the springtime, and though the free-traders were certainly aware of its existence, he fancied it might afford him a hiding-place.

He hesitated whether or not to leave the negro in position, but he reflected that if the free-traders found neither boat nor head on their return they might reasonably conclude that they had been mistaken and not pursue their search further. They were superstitious enough to regard the cries as coming from the ghosts of the crew they had made no effort to succour, and in the absence of anything to explain what they had seen and heard, would not likely be eager to stay long in a spirit-haunted spot, especially when it was growing dark. At the same time, he was glad to be rid of this ghastly presence, and with some difficulty, for the body was heavy, he managed to raise it and pitch it over the ridge.

It slid rapidly down the slippery side of the Stack, and, much to his relief, vanished instantly.

The ship's company, he told himself, was again complete.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASTAWAY

AS rapidly as possible Neil scrambled down into his boat, cast her off, and, settling to the oars, pulled round to the mouth of the sea-cave, into which the swell rolled with a sluggish lurch and heave. His last visit had been on a day of brilliant sunshine, when a bluish sheen wavered along the walls of the grotto, and when one could trace the undulating lines of the rock columns far down into the transparent depths. Now all was gloomy: the sea a murky, grayish brown, like the mist which shrouded it, the narrow opening yawning black and forbidding, while from it there issued a hollow moaning like the mournful song of some huge shell. Had it not been for the fog, he would have tried to slip round the southern Stack, and trust to the start this would give him and to his own powers as an oarsman; but he knew better than to grope his way in this reef-sown sea, and so crept cautiously within the arch.

The cave was of no great length, but half-way down it a branch ran off almost at right angles, and into this Neil thrust his boat, and made her fast by jamming her painter into a cranny. He sat still for a time, feeling fairly secure; then, wearying of doing nothing, and there being no sign of the smugglers, he clambered up to a ledge which, even at full tide, was above the water-level. It led along the side of the cavern as far as the entrance, beyond which it was continued on the face of the Stack, running round towards the channel he had just left. From it he could hear any boat approaching, and if the free-traders entered, he would have them at his mercy, for strewn on the ledge were small boulders and many loose stones, with which he could soon cause them to beat a retreat.

'Humph!' he said to himself, 'you should have been an admiral, Neil. Your dispositions are excellent: your own ship out of harm's way, while the enemy, to reach her, have to run the gauntlet with a vengeance. One of these lumps would just about send them to the bottom.'

This was all very well, but scarcely an hour of daylight remained, and he was growing hungry. His town life had not fitted him for an adventure of this sort, though in the old days he would have enjoyed nothing better.

'Confound the rascals!' he growled as he picked his way along the ledge in the semi-darkness, and then halted suddenly. A short distance in front of him lay something dark and irregular in shape which was not a boulder. His eyes were getting accustomed to the gloom, and as he drew nearer it he saw that it was a human body.

'This gets monotonous,' he muttered, with a laugh which hid a feeling of nervous discomfort. He was no coward, but the dead negro still haunted him, and there was something uncanny in coming across another corpse in such a place.

'Poor wretch!' he thought. 'What the sea began it might have finished.' But a further discovery filled him with a genuine pity. This other relic of the wreck was a woman. She was scantily clad, and lay face downwards, long tresses of dark hair streaming about her shoulders, which were bare. One arm was doubled up beneath her, the other outstretched, and he noticed that the fingers were clenched, shut fast with the rigid strength of the dead—the dead who have been drowned. 'She must have been washed up here by a wave,' was his inward comment.

Kneeling down, he turned her gently round upon her back. Even in the dim light, even in death, he could see that she was young and comely.

'Ay, ay,' he said to himself, 'but the sea takes

toll of all; yet it's a sad pity. Oh, damn those rogues! I half wish they were here to sink with her. But no, my lass,' he went on, 'you've kept clear of the sea so far, and I'll see to it that you rest in a kirkyard.'

He felt himself a fool for his pains, but he had not the heart to pitch this hapless waif into the cold and greedy water which lapped sullenly below him. For all his reserve and his sarcasm, Neil Darroch had a kindly heart enough. He stooped again to lift the body in his arms, but as he did so he started. It almost seemed to him as if there was life yet present. He placed his hand over the region of the heart; he could feel nothing, but his studies had not been confined to law. In his wild days some of his boon companions had been students of medicine, and from them he had picked up many a rough-and-ready hint. He turned the body round again, so that the heart would fall against the ribs, and this time there could be no doubt. It still beat, feebly it is true, but there was yet pulsation. At the wrist he could detect no sign of life. He passed his hand in front of the mouth, and there was no breath-stream to be felt; the face was icy cold, the eyes closed, but it mattered not.

To his joy he remembered that the day before, when starting off for the caves, he had slipped a brandy-flask into his coat-pocket. It was there now. He unscrewed the top, and forced some of the contents between the teeth. He had little hope of saving the woman, but none the less, he resolved to spare no effort. It was fortunate that she had lain face downwards. If she had been upon her back, it is probable her tongue would have choked her. This Neil Darroch knew. He knew also that she must have been strong and healthy, otherwise she would never have survived so long. As it was, he could scarcely credit that she had been washed

from the ship's decks to such a place, and yet her hair was damp with more than the sea-fog; her clothes were crusted with the sea-salt. He knelt beside her, and chafed her hands. He poured more brandy into her mouth, but it merely lodged there, and trickled from the corners of her lips. He set to work and moved her arms and rolled her upon her side in the way he had been told was customary in such cases. Then he remembered there had been no froth about her lips. It was possible she was dying more of cold and exposure than of water-laden lungs.

As soon as this occurred to him he stripped off some of her clothes, divested himself of his coat and overcoat, and wrapped the woman in them. For half an hour he continued his exertions, and only then was gratified by seeing some reaction to his treatment.

The woman stirred, and swallowed some of the fluid. The light was so poor that he could not now see more than the outline of her face; he could not see if there was any twitching of her eyelids, any other sign of life. But he did not hesitate. To let her remain in this cold, damp hole meant certain death. He had no doubt that he could find his way through the channel, and with care it might be possible to shape a course for the mouth of the Whipple, as on the landward side of the Stacks and Skerries there were few isolated rocks.

The smugglers constituted a danger, but he determined to face it. In the fog and gathering darkness it was more than likely that he would be able to give them the slip if they were still in the neighbourhood.

Raising the woman, he carried her along the ledge, and with some difficulty got her into the boat. Then, casting off, he pulled slowly and cautiously for the open sea. Once free of the cave, he headed for the passage, and then, lying on his oars, listened

intently. Hearing nothing to alarm him, he bent to his work, and soon was clear of the grim walls on either side. To make certain of gaining open water, he continued rowing steadily towards the shore, and then, setting the boat's bow for what he thought was the direction in which lay Shiachan and safety, he started at full speed. He rowed well and strongly, and his craft hissed and splashed upon the long, smooth swell as she sprang forward with fresh impetus at every stroke.

For once in his life Neil Darroch was in dead earnest. He was set upon saving this woman upon whom he had stumbled in so remarkable a way, and thus, when there came a sudden hail from somewhere near him, and then the measured beat of oars, a very stern look came into his face, which boded ill to any who might interfere with him. Trusting to the low-lying mist and the gloom of night, he never paused, save to administer more brandy to his passenger.

Presently he became aware that the chase had commenced, and that this other boat was near him. For a time there would be the sound of splashing blades and a swishing keel, then a pause, and then again the noise of the pursuit, as the smugglers got an inkling of his whereabouts. There was something very curious in thus flying from a foe which could be heard though not seen—a sense of exhilaration in driving onwards into black obscurity, striving to avoid a danger which was invisible, but none the less real. For a good ten minutes he held his own, fervently trusting that he was heading aright, and taking care that if he erred at all it should be in the direction of the shore. Then he became aware that the Pitlochie boat had gained upon his, and that they were rowing level, though at some distance apart, he being nearer the beach.

Scarcely had this dawned on him when the sound of oars ceased yet again, and then a black shape

came gliding towards him, while a man standing in the boat's bow called upon him to heave to.

By way of answer Neil wrenched at his starboard oar; his boat swung round as though working on a pivot, and the smugglers' craft, with half a dozen men in her, ran past astern. As she did so Neil shipped one of his oars, sprang to his feet, and with the other lunged at the figure in her bows. Uttering a cry of alarm, the man tried to avert the blow, lost his balance, and vanished backwards over the gunwale, while a storm of curses burst from his companions.

Neil paid no heed, but, seeing they would be some time in picking up their comrade, he took advantage of their confusion, and was quickly out of sight.

'If I was their enemy before, I am doubly so now,' he thought, as he laboured to put as great a stretch of sea between him and them as possible.

In the excitement of the chase he had almost forgotten the woman, who lay motionless on the planking at his feet.

'It is worth while,' he muttered, 'if it is the price of a life; if not, then I have been a fool, that is all.'

Even supposing he had not been recognised, the news that he had brought a woman ashore, living or dead, could not be easily kept from the men of Pitlochie, and then the sooner he left Darroch House the better. The smugglers had pretty well got to the end of their tether, and the fishermen believed they would scatter in search of more congenial soil after Ian Darroch's death; but before doing so they would be all the more likely to take some kind of revenge upon a man who had defied them, trespassed upon their preserves, and given one of their number something to cool his ardour.

But Neil was too much occupied to waste time in uneasy forebodings. In the excitement of his encounter with the free-traders, he had lost all idea of his bearings, and so could only row his hardest

from the spot without the vaguest notion as to whither he was going. Happily for him there soon loomed up on his right a dark mass, which he knew must be the cliffs, while the long boom of the swell sounded in his ears. He crept closer, and then, keeping along the shore, arrived off the river mouth without having heard anything more of the smugglers.

The tide was now half-full, and he crossed the bar with ease, and began to pull rapidly up stream in the direction of Darroch House. It occurred to him to leave the castaway at one of the fisher cottages; but he dismissed the thought, knowing she would be better tended by Teeny, the old housekeeper, who was both capable and willing, and had proved herself a faithful servant to Ian Darroch.

As soon as the water became so shallow that his boat was in danger of grounding, he ran her up on the bank and leaped out of her. Then, stooping, he lifted the woman in his arms. That she was recovering was evident. She struggled feebly, and groaned as if in pain.

'You are safe,' he said. 'Have no fear; we'll have you comfortable in a few minutes;' and then he set off along the narrow path which led from the Whipple to the house of Darroch.

It was nearly pitch-dark and a fine rain was falling. His shirt was soaked with perspiration; the cold nipped him severely now that his violent exercise was at an end, but he hurried on, though the woman was no light weight. His feeling of relief was great when he saw welcome lights before him. The door was open; a man—it was his uncle, Monsieur Deschamps—stood on the threshold peering out into the night. Neil could hear his shrill voice while he was yet twenty yards away. The old Frenchman was speaking rapidly to himself, as was his way when excited.

'Qui va là!' he cried, as Neil with his burden came within the circle of light.

'Ah! it is you, Noël. Where in God's name have you been, my son? The master is worse, and—— But what have you there?'

'It's a woman,' said Neil hurriedly—'a passenger from the barque which you remember was wrecked yesterday. Go and fetch Teeny, like a good man; we must get her to bed at once.'

Always obedient, Monsieur Deschamps shuffled away with many expressions of surprise, and Neil was at liberty to observe his prize more closely. He looked at the face nestling within the velvet collar of his overcoat.

'Humph!' said he, with a little jerk of his head; 'it appears that she was worth the saving, after all.'

Teeny, who had been watching Ian Darroch wheezing out his life, now hurried forward—a brisk little woman with gray hair and ruddy cheeks. She had not much English, but the little she could boast was spoken with that soft Highland accent which is both quaint and attractive.

'She will be perishing with the cold, poor thing! Yes, yes, Mr. Neil, leave her to me now and look to yourself. There will be enough sick without another.'

'Very well; she will occupy my room,' said Neil.

'Permit me to place mine at the lady's disposal,' said Monsieur Deschamps, with a bow and a flourish, his puckered old face lighting up with the pleasure this chance of a little gallantry afforded him.

He had been a stranger to the society of any woman save his sister, Teeny, and the fishermen's wives for nearly twenty years.

'So be it, uncle,' answered Neil, for he did not wish to hurt the old man's feelings, and, if anything, his own room was the plainer and barer of the two. 'I trust she may be able to thank you herself ere many days have passed.'

'No thanks are due—no thanks are due,' murmured

Monsieur Charles, all in a flutter. 'She will, I am sure, find the place very excellent for the health—the air invigorating, and the company, now that you are here, my dear boy, both elevating and——'

He stopped abruptly, for Neil and the housekeeper had hurried off. With a meaningless smile and a hand fumbling at his well-cut lips, now so void of any expression but a contented weakness, the old fellow wandered off to the hall, a silk handkerchief dangling half-way out of his tail-coat pocket.

'Between ourselves,' he murmured to himself in French, 'it is not a pleasant thing to have to do; but such a visitor cannot be tolerated, and the master being ill, Noël must attend to it.'

He waited impatiently till Neil, who had seen that everything which could be done had been done for the unexpected visitor, returned tired and hungry.

'Where is Geoffrey?' was his first question.

'You refer to the young man who came here several days since?' said Monsieur Deschamps, with an air quite foreign to him.

'Of course,' answered Neil. 'I have tried to explain to you that he is my step-brother.'

'I decline to regard him as any relation,' said his uncle, with such emphasis that Neil stared hard at him.

He had never seen the old man assume so grand a manner, but he recalled his varying moods, and only smiled good-naturedly as he replied:

'That is quite unnecessary, sir. Although his father and mine were the same, it does not entitle him to the honour of being one of your family.'

He knew how susceptible Monsieur Deschamps was to a little harmless flattery, and humoured him accordingly.

'I should disown him if it did, for such habits are not to my taste.'

'Why?' asked Neil in astonishment. 'What has he been doing now?'

'Have the goodness to follow me, Noël, and you shall see for yourself.'

He led the way to the room which Geoffrey Darroch occupied, and threw open the door.

There upon the floor, his handsome face flushed, his dress disordered, an empty brandy-bottle at his side, lay the heir of Darroch in the heavy sleep of a drunken man.

'I feared as much,' said Neil quietly. 'He had the watery eye and the high colour of the occasional toper. Well, we must get him to bed also.'

Having discharged what he considered his duty, Monsieur Deschamps' fine airs vanished, and he meekly assisted in placing Geoffrey Darroch within the bed-curtains, where they left him to regain consciousness and develop a headache.

When, later on, Neil was left alone, his thoughts were far from pleasant. He saw trouble ahead—trouble with this brother of his and with the men of Pitlochie; but when, wearied and worried, he fell asleep in his chair, he was haunted by visions of two faces, the one dead, black, and hideous, the other the most dainty and attractive he had ever known.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONSPIRATORS

TWO men were gazing from an upper window of a house in Paris at the apparently endless succession of the allied troops pouring into the city. Cossacks and cuirassiers, Prussian cavalry and Austrian grenadiers, foot-guards and artillery filed past below them. The streets were thronged by a silent, yet terrified crowd, who now witnessed what the oldest amongst them could not remember—the humbling of the heart of France.

Suddenly at some distance there arose a shout—a shout which rapidly grew in intensity, and finally changed into repeated bursts of cheering. Its import was not at first apparent to the two men above, but as it passed from mouth to mouth the people upon the pavement immediately below them took up the cry with wild enthusiasm till it drowned the heavy tread of the troops, the jingling of accoutrements, the rumble of cannon.

'Long live the Emperor Alexander! Long live our liberators!' yelled the Parisians; and at the words the watchers withdrew their heads, and the bigger of them slammed down the window with such violence that its frame rattled, and one of its panes was cracked across.

He was a man who in any company would have attracted attention. Tall and very strongly built, with coal-black hair, swarthy complexion, and a commanding presence, Carlo Massoni was clearly not one of the common herd. His features were good, but his expression unpleasant. He wore an habitual scowl, which just then was more apparent than usual.

'Do you hear them, Emile d'Herbois?' he said to his companion, with a gesture of disdain.

The latter nodded, and swore softly to himself. He presented a marked contrast to the man Massoni, being a short, slim creature, with a thin and anxious face, his hair turning gray, though he did not look much above fifty. His eyes, light blue in colour, were set so closely in his head that they gave him a sinister appearance, while he seemed unable to remain at rest, his fingers twitching, his feet moving hither and thither, his whole body full of a nervous energy. He reminded one of a weasel.

'Well,' said Massoni impatiently, 'and what do you think of it all?'

'Nay,' answered the other; 'let us first have your opinion, Carlo, my friend.'

'Cautious as ever, I see,' replied his companion, with the suspicion of a sneer. 'Well, at any rate, I, Carlo Massoni, am not afraid to speak my mind. My opinion is that our time is coming.'

He flung himself into a chair, and fixed his dark eyes on the man before him, who had begun pacing the floor with quick, uneven steps, but who at his words wheeled round and faced him.

'Very good,' said he, 'and the money, Carlo? In these days nothing can be done without money.'

'True, there seems little hope of raising it here in Paris, at any rate. Yonder scum will dance to anyone who will pipe to them.'

'And so shall yet dance to our playing. Is it not so?'

'When we scatter coin as well, and not till then.'

'But what if I see a way to do so?'

The other sprang to his feet.

'Do you mean anything, or are you speaking vaguely?' he cried. 'Have you a plan?'

'No,' said Emile d'Herbois, resuming his walk; 'I have no plan.'

'Then what the d——'

'I have no plan, most impatient of men, but I think I have the money. Yes, I think I can safely say so.'

'You would weary a saint with your mysteries. Can you not come to the point?'

'I am coming, but you will kindly allow me to take my own way of getting there,' snapped the other, producing a snuff-box, into which he thrust his long, thin nose, as if he were a fowl dabbing at grain.

He sneezed violently, and uttered a sigh of pleasure.

'This is a habit you unfortunately did not acquire,' he said, with a cold smile; 'but I can assure you it quickens the intellect.'

'Mine needs no such aid, I am thankful to say.'

'No, that is true enough; a sedative would suit

you better. You are too impetuous, too fiery, to make a good conspirator.'

'But not too weak to wring your neck, Monsieur d'Herbois.'

'Precisely, but too wise. We do not kill the goose; you know the old saw.'

'It is these golden eggs I would fain see.'

'Then I will be frank with you. My sister, a woman whom it is fortunate you never met, as she was possessed of considerable beauty——'

'If you will forgive me saying so, that is difficult to realize.'

'I will not only forgive you, my dear Carlo, I will explain. All the good looks in our family passed me by and settled upon her; but come, we have trifled with words long enough. My sister, God rest her soul! married an American, against my wishes, it is true, though the man was a good Republican. I foolishly quarrelled with her over this trifling matter, and now she is lost to me. As you know, I am not a man of warm emotions, like you of the sunny South, but all my affections were centred on this, my only sister, my only near relative in fact. Her husband, a very wealthy man, died several years ago; but even then I would not forgive her. She herself passed to her rest at the close of last year, leaving behind her a daughter, a girl who must now be nearly twenty years of age. This daughter she committed to my care, with the management—you follow me, Carlo?—with the management of her affairs. Does this give you a clue?'

'Sapristi!' exclaimed the other; 'it is plain as the nose on your face. You put this money to a noble use.'

'Very good, but what of the girl, my niece?'

'I do not think,' said Massoni with a coarse laugh, 'that your conscience will trouble you much about the girl.'

'Indeed!' snapped Monsieur d'Herbois. 'Then let me tell you that you are sadly mistaken. Had this girl come to me, not a penny of her money would I have touched, save to invest it for her, and put it to the best advantage; but the girl has not come.'

'Then where is she?'

'With her mother, I fear. Her ship, the *Auvergne*, should have reached Havre a month ago. She was under the captain's care, who was to have seen her safe in my keeping. Neither ship, captain, nor niece has been heard of since they left New York. From incoming vessels I learn that there have been heavy storms in the Atlantic. The *Auvergne*, I believe, has foundered. In the event of the girl's death this fortune passes to me. When, therefore, I am certain that it is mine by right, it will be at the disposal of our unhappy country, which, thanks to a tyranny worse than any Bourbon's, is now the prey of every filthy foreigner.'

'And when will you be sure, Emile?'

'There is no immediate hurry. At present we must watch and wait. As far as I can see, those who have now the ordering of affairs will do one of three things: they will make peace with Napoleon, establish a regency, or restore Louis.'

'Which will be the more likely?'

'The last, friend Carlo, or I am much mistaken. They have the power just now, and the Emperor, thank God! is helpless.'

'I would he were dead!' cried the other vehemently.

'Others besides you will utter the same wish before we are finished with him,' said d'Herbois. 'but for our purpose a regency would be the best. No one is ever satisfied with a Regent, and they would soon learn to hail a President and an Assembly as a happy deliverance. And now what of yourself?'

The question was a natural one. These men had seen nothing of each other for ten long years—ten years which had sufficed to change the face of Europe, which had been amongst the most eventful in the world's history.

Carlo Massoni was a Corsican, who, like another of that island, had adopted France as his country when a mere lad. Unlike that other, his career had been a signal failure. Of good birth, with an ample share of health, if not of money, he had quitted his native mountains, and wandered to Paris. Clever, but vicious, he had idled and wasted his time, while other men, grasping the chances that lay ready to their hands, had risen during the terrible epoch which convulsed the whole land, but especially its capital. Eventually he became a servant in the famous Jacobin club, and came under the notice of one of its most active members, a man considerably older than himself, named Emile d'Herbois.

Emile d'Herbois was of a type by no means common at that time. For one thing, he was strictly honest and disinterested. He was a Jacobin because he firmly believed that the salvation of France lay in a republican government, and he devoted all his talents, which were not inconsiderable, to the furtherance of his views. But though honest himself, he had no scruples in making use of any kind of man who might suit his purpose. He perceived that Massoni possessed just those qualities which he himself lacked—a dauntless courage, a fine physique, and a recklessness which, if controlled, might do much. He was able to help this Corsican on several occasions, and a friendship grew up between them, never very great, it is true, but firm enough to enable them to work together harmoniously, and with a single eye to the object in view.

D'Herbois was the master spirit, and where he led Massoni followed. Such a combination of cunning and courage, of shrewd caution and heedless

daring, might have achieved great things, had not the shadow of the First Consul blotted out all hopes of a democracy.

D'Herbois accepted the situation with a good grace. He was one of those men who are content to wait if only they see some chance of eventually obtaining their desires. Massoni, hot-blooded and rash, could neither brook delay nor advice. He ventured to pit his strength against that of the rising power and was promptly vanquished. Thereafter d'Herbois, who had warned him in vain, lost sight of him, but now he had again turned up at the very time that d'Herbois's brain was once more beginning to plot and plan.

The older man had recognised Napoleon's greatness, and wisely bowed before it, but he had also seen that an Empire founded upon military power and on that alone was not likely to be stable. It had lasted longer than he had thought possible, but the crash had come at last. It was then with a genuine pleasure that he had stumbled across Carlo Massoni, who had fallen upon evil days, and inhabited the attic from which they viewed the occupation of Paris by the three great Powers.

That pleasure was quickly modified. This Massoni, as he quickly recognised, was not the man he had once known, a youth with lofty ideals and a high sense of honour, despite his lax code of morals and native indolence. The man before him looked like a needy adventurer consumed with ideas of revenge. He doubted hugely if he could again direct and control him, but of this doubt he showed never a sign. Massoni was free and easy, but this Emile d'Herbois did not resent. He was singularly devoid of personal conceit and was merely amused at his companion's offhand manner. Still, he had need of help. Jacobinism had changed with the times. There were few of any importance who now held his opinions; and if he was to form a party, he must

begin with recruits of whom he knew something and whom he could trust.

He thought it wise to take this man so far into his confidence; but before going further, he was anxious to hear what had befallen him, and so to get an idea of the changes ten years had wrought in his pupil, hence his question.

'Sit down then for Heaven's sake, and drink a glass of wine with me, for you will find it thirsty work even listening. Thank God! I have a passable bottle in the cupboard which I am not ashamed to offer you.'

'No, I thank you. As I grow older I grow more abstemious, friend Carlo—a habit you would do well to follow.'

'Oh, hang your philosophy! A short life and a merry one for me. You are a queer fellow, Emile; your mind is placid, your body like a restless spirit, while my brain works like a windmill, and my big carcass is like a sloth's, unless there is something on hand.'

'Hence we agree; but let us have your veracious narrative.'

The story told him was sufficiently remarkable. Massoni had become a wanderer on the face of the earth. He had subsisted as a waiter in London, as a labourer in America; he had voyaged to the savage islands of the Pacific; he had rubbed shoulders with all sorts and conditions of men and women.

He frankly confessed that since returning to Europe he had been engaged in several plots to assassinate Napoleon, all of which had failed.

As he made this announcement, with something of bravado in his manner, D'Herbois shrank back from him.

'You go too far,' said he. 'To assassinate is to ruin your cause, besides being a crime in the sight of God and man.'

The Corsican gave a gruff laugh.

'There is no God,' he said; 'and that for what man may think!'

He snapped his thumb and forefinger in the face of Emile d'Herbois.

'As for ruining a cause,' he went on, 'I was considering myself alone. We have an old feud with the house of Buonaparte, and when he was First Consul he made a mock of me—of me, Carlo Massoni; therefore I shall yet have him at my mercy, and then——' He made a gesture as of striking home with a dagger.

D'Herbois looked at him with disgust.

'Your morals have not improved in a decade,' he said briskly; 'but go on. How did you fail?'

'I will tell you, Emile. Do you remember a man Gironde—Jules Gironde, once in the army, then a member of the secret service?'

'Gironde,' said D'Herbois musingly. 'What, a little fat fellow, with a strut in his walk, and eyes like a hawk?'

'The same, curse him! He is, or was rather, as sharp as a fish-bone in the throat. He is to blame for all my troubles.'

'And how, pray?'

'The fool was devoted to his beloved Emperor—served him like a dog, though, as far as I can tell, he got nothing in return, save one of those digs in the paunch or slaps in the face the great buffoon loves to bestow on his veterans, with or without the cross of the Legion.'

'You interest me,' said D'Herbois, coming to a stop in his walk. 'Had Napoleon more like this man about him, there would have been no chance of a republic while he and they lived. But I interrupt.'

'You do,' answered Massoni coolly. 'I once killed a Spaniard for doing as much. Ay, you do well to turn pale; courage was never a strong point with you.'

He tossed off a third glass of wine, and glared triumphantly at the weak figure before him.

D'Herbois, though he knew that there was much truth in what the other proclaimed so brutally, showed no signs of irritation. He was conscious of his own failings, and acquiesced in them. At the same time, he began to wish that he had not met this man, who was a totally different being from the enthusiastic young Corsican of his earlier days. He recognised that he had been unwise in his confidences; but his soul had been starving for someone to whom he could air his views, whose sympathies he could enlist in carrying out the great scheme of his life. It was too late to draw back now. Instinctively he sought to cover his mistake by learning the secrets of this garrulous and boastful bravo.

'Courage,' he said quietly, 'is greatly a matter of health. I am a dyspeptic.'

'And so should Gironde be by this time,' said the other with a truly diabolic chuckle.

'Indeed!'

'Yes, indeed. He foiled me, as I have told you; never mind how. I was clapped in prison at Marseilles, but I escaped. My liberty was brief, but Gironde's was still briefer. By the time I was caught and condemned to the galleys he was on his way to Corsica, where he has been having a pleasant time at a little hill resort of mine. Yes, he has been there, at least most of him, for five years.'

He made a curious motion with his hands at the sides of his head, and D'Herbois nodded shortly. He had heard of the habits and customs of Corsican brigands.

'Gironde, in a way, owes his lease of life to himself,' continued Massoni. 'My orders were that he was to be kept till I returned and passed sentence upon him. I expected then to attend to him very quickly, but, as the devil would have it, I fell into the hands of the English. Do you know what an

English naval prison is like? No?—then thank God. Look here, Emile d'Herbois.'

He stretched out a long brown hand, the nails of which were neither trimmed nor clean, and emphasized his words by ticking them off upon his fingers.

'Three men,' said he, 'I hate upon this earth, and in this order: the first, Buonaparte, the buffoon; the second, Gironde, the spy; the third, the Englishman, lord of heaven and the high seas, as he thinks himself. I am a little revenged upon the last, for I have accounted for three of them; now I go to settle with Gironde; then will come the man, the devil rather, who first stole from me my love, then mocked me, then chained me to an oar and made me what I now am.'

He finished the bottle, and rose to his feet.

'Can you spare me a small sum?' he asked.

'I can,' answered Emile d'Herbois; 'but I do not give it for nothing.'

'No, no,' said the other. 'With all my faults, I am a good Jacobin yet, as you shall find. There is no need of haste till we see how things go; but before I start for Corsica I will find you a man who will prove invaluable, who knows Paris and everyone in it, I verily believe. If this is to bear fruit at all, we must have his aid.'

'Again you interest me,' said D'Herbois, pulling out a purse, and laying a few gold coins upon the table. 'This will meet your immediate wants; and the man, what is his name?'

'His name is Craspinat,' answered Massoni—'and he is a beauty,' he added under his breath as he bade his visitor adieu.

'Yes, yes, my bomb-maker,' he said to himself a moment later, 'I have done you a good turn to-day and helped myself as well, but it would be awkward were this girl to turn up.'

With that he threw open the window, and leaning out, watched the retreating figure of Emile d'Herbois.

CHAPTER VI.

A FAIR YANKEE

THE day was glorious, the air fresh and cold, with something of a land smell about it—a fine mellow odour as of the turnip-fields about the Whipple water, and the breath of the hills, now garbed in faded bracken and rough heather out of bloom. There was just a touch of spring in it, an earnest of bursting buds and lively sap; a foreshadowing of lengthening days and softening showers; a reminder of the advent of the vast herring-shoals, with their attendant and voracious company—little fox-sharks and hideous dog-fish, shimmering, black-barred mackerel, wandering, huge-headed cod, blubbery porpoises, pig-eyed dolphins, gulls and gannets, and the mighty bottle-nose himself intent upon the fry.

A robin, his breast still sombre-hued, trilled out his early song from a patch of bare bush, and shafts of sunlight played here and there on the old gray walls and leaden turrets of Darroch House.

But while without all spoke of life and action, there was death within. Ian Darroch had gone to his account, and of all the outlawed men who half a century and more ago had pushed off from the sinking brig there remained but one.

It was the day of the funeral, and early in the morning, from far up Glen Dhu, there had come the long wail of drone and chanter, the pipes playing the melancholy pibroch of the broken clan as the smugglers of Pitlochie marched to do honour to the dead.

Since the old man had passed away Neil had wondered if the free-traders would make their appearance. Dugald, the piper, he knew would be present, but he was doubtful about the others, of

whom he had seen nothing since he rescued the girl, who still slept the sleep of exhaustion, having only wakened at long intervals to take nourishment, and immediately to seek again the land of dreams.

It was with a curious feeling of satisfaction that he found every one of the lawless crew gathered before Darroch House, waiting in silence to accompany the coffin.

There was no service. Geoffrey, indeed, had expressed his surprise at the absence of 'the Church,' as he called it, but was wise and sober enough to see that any religious ceremony would have been a little incongruous. Neil was certain that the minister of Portroy would flatly refuse to officiate if asked, for on his last visit to Darroch the grim old Jacobite had shown him the door with but scant ceremony.

So Ian Darroch was buried without book or bell, and though Neil was in a manner grieved at his loss, the only signs of sorrow came from Teeny and Monsieur Deschamps. The gloom and dismal preparations appealed powerfully to the latter, and, unable to control himself, he wandered about with red eyes and a quivering lip, shaking his head as if he had lost his dearest friend, instead of a man who, till he grew so feeble that he was confined to one room, had very nearly terrified the poor old Frenchman into a hopeless idiocy.

As the little procession formed, the smugglers fell in before the fishermen, and though Neil noticed that this gave rise to some wrangling, he did not interfere. Indeed, he could not help feeling it was but fitting, for the fishermen were decent, hard-working folk, who had nothing in common with the man whose strange, embittered life had at last come to an end.

He was relieved to find that the free-traders paid no special attention to him, though had he heard

their talk, he would have found good reason for anxiety.

All such thoughts, however, were driven out of his head as, after a preliminary blast, the pipes burst into a coronach.

The deep sonorous hum of the death music sounded like a moaning for the dead, rising now and then to a shriek of sorrow, as a higher note quavered on the reeds, anon falling to a low tremulous wail with a wild peal sobbing through it all the time, and mingling with the dismal groaning of the drones. The tears sprang to Neil's eyes at the sound. It was not so much that he grieved for the old man, but the sad song of the pipes made him think of the many times he who lay in the coffin had heard such music, had heard also other pibrochs —the full swelling skirl and defiant blast of the great war-pipes, telling of the glory of the clans, a glory long since faded; the quick martial music of the gathering; the loud imperious summons to the charge. He had inherited a sensitive nature, his imagination was vivid, and he thrilled all over as he kept time to the Highland dirge.

Although he knew it not, another who heard it for the first time was gazing in wonder at the scene before her.

Earlier in the day a stray sunbeam had made its way into a room which faced the south. It had fallen on a firm little chin, under which the sheet was tightly tucked, had kissed a pair of rosy lips, had played upon a delicate and finely-shaped nose, and rested at length on a pair of closed eyelids, from which long dark lashes drooped upon a fair white skin. Its light spread till it touched a smooth, broad forehead, and picked out strands of bronze in a mass of dark hair, which streamed in wild confusion upon the pillow. It came and went, growing stronger, till the sleeper stirred and opened a pair of hazel eyes, which blinked, being yet heavy with a

long slumber and dazzled by the gleam upon them. But the sun was not to be denied. Already the world outside had wakened under his influence; birds had long been twittering cheerily, and all Nature had owned his sway. He was not going to fail with this dainty damsel. Her pallor was gone; she had regained her strength and vigour, and it was time she was up and about.

Presently she uttered a sigh of content, stretched out her arms, and then raised herself upon one elbow. She looked about her in bewilderment. Where was she? What had happened? She lay back again, and from the frown which gathered on her brow, seemed to be thinking deeply. Then she gave a low cry, and sat up, staring wildly about her.

The memory of a helpless ship, an angry sea and cruel black rocks had come to her. She shut her eyes tightly, and pressed one hand upon them, as if to blot out a vision of drowning men and utter destruction.

The roar of mighty waters was in her ears, the despairing shrieks of the drowned, the rending and splitting of stout planks. Again she saw men squirming beneath heavy masts, and sucked out of sight like flies above a sink outlet. They had perished, but she had survived.

She recalled event after event of that terrible night, which she had come to regard as her last on earth, and of that still more terrible morning when a helpless wreck strove to beat off an iron-bound coast, and was driven to her fate. Now she remembered how, as she clung to the stump of a mast, to which she had been lashed, her black servant had cut her loose and struggled ashore with her, battling with heavy seas on a narrow rock ledge, fighting with all his giant strength through spray and blinding sheets of foam, clinging to a spar wedged between ship and rock, and alone affording a chance of life.

She had been half-dead with fear and cold, but she could dimly remember the sudden rush he had made for safety; how they had gained a huge hollow out of the reach of the cruel sea, and how, in spite of her entreaties, he had left her with a 'Cheer up, Missy Kate,' and gone back to aid the others. Then had come the dread suspense, the long crouching and waiting, drenched and helpless, the roar of waves sweeping below her the sole answer to her piteous cries, the sudden faintness, and then a blank.

She must have been found and brought to the land. What, then, had become of the others—of the faithful Joe, of the kindly French seamen, who had done their best to keep up her spirits as disaster after disaster befell the *Auvergne?*

Again she looked about her. All was strange: this low-roofed room, with its deep-set windows, and its walls bare, except for a couple of crossed swords. Save for the dancing light, it was comfortless and was poorly furnished. She must be in a foreign country. Was it France? she asked herself. The sailors had not been able to tell her what that long, surf-frilled coast-line was which the day disclosed to their wearied, hopeless eyes. All reckoning had been lost. The good captain had been washed overboard, his first mate killed by a falling spar, and so, buffeted and bruised, the *Auvergne* had laboured and drifted, a plaything of the angry deep.

She thought of it all, then, hiding her face in the pillow, sobbed quietly to herself. But she was young and brave, and so she presently ceased weeping, and once more took stock of her surroundings. There was no bell by which to summon anyone, but on a chair she noticed a pile of neatly-folded clothes.

She rose, but a fit of weakness came upon her, and she was fain to sit down. It passed quickly;

then, as she regained her feet, she heard a sound which made her hurry to the window. It was of a nature not altogether foreign to her. In a little American town she had heard the like as a body of British troops passed through it during a retreat on Canada.

She recognised the music of the Highland pipes. Then a great fear came upon her: she was in an enemy's country. War had still been waging when the *Auvergne* had sailed, and she remembered the danger she ran even in a French ship, and the sharp look-out that had been kept for English frigates.

Clever and sharp-witted though she was, her knowledge of the world was of the slightest, and she had no idea as to what might be done with her. She assured herself that no one was likely to harm a helpless girl; but it was a timid enough face that peered through the tiny panes of coarse glass. She had half expected to see soldiers in red coats, with bare knees, and feather bonnets. What did meet her gaze was a coffin, borne shoulder high, and followed by a group of rugged-looking men, who tramped behind it without any sort of order. They passed out of sight even as she watched them, and nothing remained but a stretch of bare hilly country, a piece of meadow-land, and a glimpse of sparkling sea.

She shrank back, asking herself who was this they carried to the grave. Could it be one of the *Auvergne's* crew, or was it black Joe? How long was it since the shipwreck?

As no answer was forthcoming, she turned her attention to the clothes. They were not such as she had been accustomed to wear. This, as she was to know later, was not Teeny's fault. That good woman had intended to lay out a dress which had belonged to the gentle Frenchwoman who was remembered in Shiachan as 'Madame,' and who slept in the little hillside kirkyard to which they

were bearing Ian Darroch, in the spot marked by rusty iron railings, close to the ruins of an old chapel, which was sacred to the house of the Oak, for such was the symbol of the Clan Darroch. But Madame's clothes had suffered sadly through moths and damp, and so what Kate Ingleby found set aside for her was the Sunday dress of one of the fishermen's daughters, the housekeeper's niece, who was in service in Glasgow.

Neil, at Teeny's instigation, had borrowed it, and though a new style of garment to the forlorn girl, there was no doubt it was becoming. The fisher-lass had been something of a belle in her way, and had been wont to turn the heads of the lads in Portroy when attired in a coat and short skirt of dark blue, a spotted kerchief, bright red stockings, and neat broad-toed and buckled shoes.

But though this castaway gave to the dress an air which it lacked even when worn by the pretty Flora, she was too sad at heart, too doubtful of her future, to think much of her appearance; and in any case, there was nothing but a small hand-glass in which to survey herself. With a natural and careless grace she coiled the lustrous masses of her hair about her head, and after a moment's hesitation opened the door. A narrow stair led downwards, joining another at right angles, and descending both without meeting a soul, or hearing anything but the solemn ticking of a clock, she found her way into another room—a long, low chamber, hung with a few portraits and prints, and heavily-curtained at the window.

For all that, she had been watched. Monsieur Deschamps, who had been left behind to mop his eyes, and lament he knew not what, had heard her light footstep, and hastening to the door of the hall, had seen her enter the 'living room,' as it was called.

Her appearance greatly excited him. His vague sorrow forgotten, he hurried off to Neil's room,

which he now occupied, and to which his few belongings had been transferred. There, from the depths of a huge box, he extracted all the finery he possessed in the world.

With trembling hands he got himself into a suit well nigh as ancient as himself, and despite its faded colours, still sufficiently remarkable for a day when men were turning to less gaudy and more serviceable clothing. It was a Court dress of the period of the unfortunate Louis, who more than expiated his own faults, if not those of his predecessors, in the Place de la Révolution.

Poor Charles Deschamps was no longer the man he had been when he last donned such gay attire. His coat of yellow satin, embroidered at the pockets, hung loosely on his withered frame; his waistcoat, of a delicate pink, no longer fitted him elegantly; his white knee-breeches would at the buckles have passed twice round his shrunken legs. He had but the one pair of silk pumps, and took such pride in his slippers—the gift and work of Teeny, and the only present made him for many a year, till Neil brought him a treasured snuff-box—that he retained these wondrous things of wool and beads; and so, having arranged his queue and sighed over the want of powder, he made his way down the stairs, lace handkerchief in hand, and a bright flush on either cheek, surely as queer a figure as Darroch House, in all its history, had held.

Such was the apparition which suddenly appeared before the astonished American girl. She stood silent and amazed, as this gorgeously-arrayed old man advanced in a series of short steps with multitudinous bows and flourishes.

'I trust I see you recovered,' was what he said. 'You will find the air excellent, and my nephew being present, the company agreeable,'

'I thank you, sir,' she managed to stammer out, 'I am very well.'

'Believe me, I am rejoiced to hear it,' he answered with yet another bow. 'Allow me to have the honour of making my introduction—Charles Deschamps, and at your service.'

'You are French!' she cried.

'But yes,' he replied, 'is it possible I see before me a countrywoman?'

'My mother was from France.'

So far the old beau had behaved in the most exemplary manner, but at this piece of information his wits deserted him. His language and gestures became extravagant; he laughed shrilly and performed a little dance, skipping this way and that, till the girl could no longer doubt that he was insane.

She hastily retreated behind one of the curtains, but he did not appear to notice this movement on her part, pirouetting about and babbling to himself.

In the midst of his performance the door was thrown open, and Geoffrey Darroch entered.

'Good God!' was his first exclamation, as his eye lit on the figure before him. He crossed the room and shook the old Frenchman roughly by the arm.

'Come, come,' said he, 'you have more sense than to behave like this. Bless me, but you are like a d——d parrot! Quit this silly nonsense, and put on decent clothes, you fool!'

His words, and still more his action, had an instant effect.

Monsieur Deschamps seemed to collapse at once. He stood limp and almost whimpering with fear, as had been his way when Ian Darroch ill-used him, and then slunk towards the door.

Just then, however, Neil, who had been giving necessary orders for the usual drinking which in those days was inseparable from a funeral in any part of Scotland, followed his brother, and at a glance saw how matters stood, and noticed how his uncle's pitiful face brightened at his appearance.

'You have scared him,' he said almost angrily, as the old man disappeared.

'The deuce take it!' said Geoffrey. 'It was too much to come back from such a function and find him capering like a painted monkey. Gad! you should have seen him. I had either to shake him up a bit, or die of laughing myself.'

'Well, well,' answered Neil, somewhat mollified, 'you must remember he cannot help himself. No doubt he got himself up in honour of the girl.'

'Like enough, sir, though it was a devilish queer notion; but, by the way, how is our visitor?'

'She was still asleep this morning, but from what Teeny says, she will do now, I think.'

'I'm glad to hear it, 'pon honour I am; she will liven up this dull hole, I hope. Has she any looks to commend her?'

'You had best judge for yourself, sir,' said a quiet but angry voice.

Had a thunderbolt descended at their feet the two men could not have been more surprised.

They turned sharply and confronted the girl, who had stepped out from her place of concealment.

Geoffrey, man about town though he was, did nothing but deliver himself of sundry ejaculations, neither remarkable for wit nor politeness. His brother, who was rarely at a loss for words, whose training had been such that he was not easily taken unawares, was the first to speak. His quick ear had recognised her accent, even though it was not specially pronounced.

'Pardon me,' said he quickly, with a short bow, 'but I think I see before me an American?'

'Yes,' she answered, and as he thought defiantly, 'I am from the States.'

'Oh, indeed!' said he, his face screwed up and one eye half closed, a manner he adopted when examining a witness. 'Then it is my duty to warn

you that anything you may say will be taken as evidence against you.'

He spoke merely in jest, but what prompted him to greet her in so peculiar a manner he did not himself quite know. It may have been that he disliked Americans, and without any good reason. He had met very few of them, and was one of the many who recognised that in the War of Independence they had been in the right, while even in the present struggle he regarded them as more sinned against than sinning, as having been forced into a contest clearly distasteful to them. Still, Neil, who was more of a Briton than he himself imagined, had been profoundly disgusted at the despised Yankees' brilliant victories at sea, and felt somewhat bitter at this upstart race, who dared dispute supremacy with the old country, even on her own hunting-grounds.

This feeling may have influenced him, and in addition he was old-fashioned, and had his own ideas as to woman's place and behaviour. The girl's method of introducing herself seemed both forward and impertinent to him.

A moment later he was sorry for his words, as he remembered all she had passed through—her provocation, and saw the fear and doubt come into her eyes, even though her face was in the shade. She evidently misunderstood him, but she could defend herself.

'You do not make war on women, do you?' she asked, with a quiver of scorn in her voice. 'Even in the days we beat you I have been told that was left to the Hessians. The English, I believe, are gentlemen.'

Geoffrey, who fully appreciated her answer, laughed long and loudly. Neil, vastly amused, though a trifle irritated, fumbled for his quizzing-glass, and through it scrutinized the figure before

'You are not in England, however,' he said sharply.

'Which no doubt accounts for your presence,' was her retort.

He smiled amiably. He was beginning to enjoy this encounter, and had evidently found a worthy antagonist, but neither place nor time was fitted for a fence with tongues.

'Allow me to express my admiration for your gift of repartee,' he answered courteously. 'I trust at a later period we may resume our conversation where now we leave off.'

'And high time, too,' broke in his brother. 'Splitting hairs, I call it. If it is not England by name, it's a part of England, so——'

'Pardon me,' interrupted Neil with a sudden sternness, 'you are entirely in error; this is Scotland, has ever been Scotland, and will continue so, as you, the representative of an old Highland family, should be the first to acknowledge and hope.'

'Tut, tut!' said Geoffrey impatiently, 'You weary the lady, who I am pleased to see has recovered.'

'I also,' said Neil, 'would compliment you on being able to rise unassisted. I fear my worthy uncle somewhat frightened you. Poor old man! You understand?' He tapped his forehead. 'But he is perfectly harmless.'

'I was not afraid,' replied the girl simply, yet not quite truthfully.

'Exactly; but the curtain was no doubt useful.'

'I do think,' said she, 'that you are very cruel.'

The nasal drawl, rather pleasing than otherwise, was more evident now that she was roused.

'And so do I!' said Geoffrey hotly. 'I am surprised at you, Mr. Darroch.'

Neil was surprised at himself, but his was one of those contrary natures which often say and do the very opposite of what they mean and intend.

'I should be truly sorry to earn your bad opinion,'

he answered, ignoring his brother, and addressing himself to the girl, whose face had haunted him ever since he had carried her to Monsieur Deschamps' room. 'Miss——?' he paused.

'My name is Ingleby—Kate Ingleby.'

'Thank you. Miss Ingleby, I suppose, is to consider herself your guest?' he added, turning to Geoffrey.

'Of course, sir, of course. You see'—and the latter went on to explain how matters stood. 'Dinner will soon be served, when we hope to hear your story, if such be your pleasure,' he concluded. 'Till then you will find the hall more comfortable. Allow me to offer you my arm;' and, escorted by the new Laird of Darroch, Kate Ingleby passed from the room, while Neil followed them, cool as ever to all appearance, but inwardly raging at himself, at his step-brother, and even at this fair but self-possessed American lass, for whose presence in Darroch House he alone was responsible.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVALS

MORE than a week had passed, and Kate Ingleby was still an inmate of Darroch House. She could not resume her journey unprotected, and neither brother was in a position to accompany her till after the visit of the lawyer who had control of Ian Darroch's affairs. That wily old fox had long ago got himself confirmed in the possession of his forfeited estate. He had waited till his precious escapade was forgotten, and then managed by legal aid to have his rights and privileges restored to him. But in those days Kintyre and the western isles were nearly as far from civilization as is St. Kilda at the present time.

and though Mr. Quill, of the firm of Quill and Driver, of Glasgow, had been apprised of his client's decease, it might be some time ere he put in an appearance. As a matter of fact, he had started on receipt of the news, but had been seized with illness on the road, and was further delayed by having to return, owing to pressing and important business. His letter of apology under any other circumstances would have proved highly exasperating to both brothers. As it was, neither regretted his tardiness, as it prevented their visitor setting off to join her relatives in Paris. Both men were already sorely smitten by her charms.

As for the girl herself, all was so fresh and new to her that she did not much mind her enforced detention, and she certainly could not complain of the treatment accorded her. Her life had hitherto been very peaceful and colourless, for though money was at her command, her mother had been a fretful invalid, who could not bear town life, and they had lived in retirement. Kate's pleasures had been few, and chiefly confined to her books and music. She was well read, and possessed considerable talent. Indeed, she was ignorant of the fine qualities of her voice, which, had it been trained, might have been a fortune in itself. She sang like a bird—simply, unaffectedly, and it was not long before Neil discovered this and had overcome her natural shyness at singing before strangers. There was a spinnet in the house which had belonged to his dead mother, and he had heard her accompanying herself upon it to a plaintive negro melody. But ere this he had learned all she had to tell about herself. With the candour of youth and of her country, she had told him unaffectedly of her father, a strong-minded, hard-headed American, who on a visit to Paris had fallen in love with, and carried away as his wife, the bright and vivacious Lucie d'Herbois. She spoke of her wealth, of the uncle to whom she had been going when disaster overtook the *Auvergne*. With tears

in her fine eyes she recounted the perils of the voyage and the heroism of her faithful negro; but it was not in her nature to be sad.

To begin with, she was attracted by Geoffrey, who was essentially manly, and Neil at their first interview had appeared in a very unpleasant light. A few days sufficed to change her opinions. She had known men like Geoffrey Darroch, but had never come across anyone remotely resembling the younger brother, and the novel is always interesting. Such men, spread thickly with the varnish of reserve, scarcely existed in her country, where life was too hard, the struggle for existence in a new land too absorbing, to permit the study of how best to cloak one's real feelings from the world, not from any shame or desire to deceive, but as a method of gaining self-confidence and assuring originality.

She was puzzled and, so strong a factor is woman's vanity, a little piqued by Neil's cool indifference, and his delight in drawing her into political discussions where she felt herself at a loss, though in reality she astonished the shrewd lawyer by her quick decision and ready argument.

What first installed him in her favour was the fact that he, like herself, could claim a French origin. It was characteristic of him, however, after acknowledging this fact, to make as little of it as possible, just as though he regretted to find they had anything in common, whereas he was secretly congratulating himself on his Gallic descent.

'Strange, is it not, Miss Ingleby?' he remarked, on learning that her mother was a Frenchwoman, 'that I also owe my mother, who rests yonder on the hillside, to my father's meeting with a fair French lass.'

'Is that really so?' she said eagerly; 'then,' with a roguish laugh, 'I am not so much an enemy as you were pleased to make out.'

By this time she had learned that the speech

which had so incensed her was but a harmless joke.

'I suppose so,' he answered gravely; 'but I cannot regard my French connection as very strong. My mother, on both sides of her house, could trace her descent back to a Scottish ancestry, to the marriage of an officer of Louis Eleventh's guard with a young Scotchwoman, who was being educated in France.'

'Then I guess you are not proud of your French origin?' she said regretfully.

He glanced at her with a curious smile, which changed into a frown as his brother blundered into the conversation.

'With all due deference to you, Miss Ingleby,' said Geoffrey loftily, 'I never saw much in the French myself; a vain and shallow race I call 'em. Of course,' he added graciously, 'there are exceptions; I speak of them as a whole.'

'And you lie!' said a shrill, cracked voice in French, shaking with excitement.

They one and all had forgotten Monsieur Deschamps' presence, but he was prepared to champion his people. The old man had risen to his feet, trembling and sputtering with vehemence. His first words were plain enough, but, mastered by his passion, he poured out a string of disconnected sentences, speaking so fast, so volubly, that of the three who heard him, the girl alone could catch his meaning.

Neil listened with astonishment. This man was not the gentle, soft-spoken Charles Deschamps of his boyhood. It was plain that for some reason or other he had conceived a great antipathy to Geoffrey Darroch. That fine gentleman, angered at being thus bearded in presence of a stranger, rose suddenly without pausing to reflect, and ordered Monsieur Deschamps to quit his table.

The old man, whose gust of rage had passed, and who was already beginning to smile amiably on

the company, was once more awed by Geoffrey's harshness, which on this occasion was without excuse.

Rising, he was about to do as he was bid, for all the world like a rebellious child who had become scared and penitent, when Neil interfered.

'Nonsense,' he said decisively but cheerily; 'sit down, uncle, and eat your dinner.'

Reassured immediately, the old fellow resumed his seat and, quaintly enough, bowed his head and asked a blessing, as if he were just beginning, and had no recollection of what had passed.

His action prevented a storm. Even Geoffrey, who had been on the point of asserting his authority, could not forbear smiling, and nothing more was said, Neil adroitly changing the conversation; but Kate Ingleby saw and understood, and this was her first insight into the characters of the two men into whose lives she had come so strangely.

Later, from Teeny, she learned the story of her rescue, though by no means the whole story; and, impulsive and full of gratitude, she took an early opportunity of thanking Neil. She met him on the road to Shiachan, for the fishing village had great attractions for her, and he confessed to himself that she looked more than pretty as she approached him. The fresh but balmy sea air—for it was a day like that which had graced Ian Darroch's funeral—gave colour to her usually pale cheeks, a colour which was intensified by her resolve; her face, half hidden by the great straw bonnet she wore, and which had been his mother's, appeared to him more charming than ever. It was not merely well-shaped, with a pair of eyes which could sparkle as finely as they could look dreamy and wistful, with a dainty nose and a rosebud of a mouth, but it was full of intelligence; her brow was thoughtful, and there was a pleasant mingling of dignity and vivacity in her expression.

He told himself that here one found the characteristics of two nations—the piquancy of the French, and that sober judgment and keen intellect which he understood was characteristic of the women of America, as well as of its sons.

'Good-morning, Miss Ingleby,' said he, raising his hat slightly. 'It is a fine day, is it not?'

'It is,' she heartily concurred. 'Do you know, I thought that it did nothing but rain here, Mr. Darroch.'

'Whiles it snows,' said Neil, with the faintest twinkle in his eye.

She looked puzzled, but gave a little nod of assent.

'I was wishing to see you,' she went on rather breathlessly, for she was, if anything, a trifle afraid of this man. 'You must think me very ungrateful.'

'I cannot say that idea occurred to me.'

'Perhaps not; but all the same, I have felt horrid!'

'And looked the reverse,' said Neil, with an attempt at gallantry worthy of Charles Deschamps.

She flushed hotly.

'You make it very hard for me,' she said; 'but I only heard last night that you had saved me.'

'I assure you,' said Neil, 'it was entirely unintentional.'

'No, but you must have taken trouble; I know I was nearly dead, and——' She stopped confused. 'Oh,' she cried, with a toss of her head which caused the coal-scuttle upon it to fall back on her shoulders, 'I cannot find the right words, but you know what I mean.'

'Yes, I know,' said Neil, now without a trace of his former levity; 'but, believe me, I did nothing but what a gentleman' (he laid emphasis on the word) 'would do.'

She saw his allusion.

'I am sorry I was rude,' she said; 'but when Mr. Darroch spoke I could not help myself.'

'No,' said Neil; 'Geoffrey is not always in the best of taste, though, of course, he was ignorant of your presence.'

'He has been very polite since,' she replied; and Neil did not like her taking up the cudgels on his brother's behalf.

'Very,' said he, and again raising his hat, left her and continued his walk.

His abrupt manner very naturally hurt the girl, and she promptly went and made herself most gracious to the laird, who, anxious to appear well in her sight—he remembered her account of her father's wealth—eschewed the bottle, and though he grumbled at being forced to stay on at Darroch, behaved as pleasantly as his selfish and arrogant nature would allow. Geoffrey Darroch had his good points, for few men are wholly bad. He was weak rather than wicked, and certainly just then he did his best to appear as a virtuous and respectable member of society, even if he could not conceal his dislike of Neil and Monsieur Deschamps.

His encounter with the latter had sensibly weakened his position with Kate Ingleby. Once she heard the old Frenchman's tragic story, her sympathy was roused, and sympathy with her meant more than a mere feeling of interested pity. She became the old man's companion. To his supreme delight she spoke with him in French. He was never tired of conversing with her, and followed her about like a dog. Neil found himself supplanted in his uncle's affections, and inwardly was much tickled by the old fellow's devotion. He himself was a fair French scholar, and would sometimes join in their chatter, but he had no facility in the use of idioms, and was frequently at a loss to understand them, much to his uncle's diversion.

'No, no,' he would say; 'your accent is atrocious! You spoil all the beauty, all the elegance; but mademoiselle, she is wonderful, and yet you say she has

not lived in France. She is going; ah, that is sad for me! Only perhaps when I am restored to health I also will return, and then we shall have great times. The Court, they say, is the finest in Europe! Yes, yes, I shall see it again!' and away he would go, humming to himself some snatch of verse with a catching chorus and but little meaning, which perhaps had been in vogue when he paraded in the Bois or sauntered in the avenues at Versailles.

The girl's kindness to his uncle, who was often, without the least intending it, troublesome and exacting, was not lost on such a close observer as Neil Darroch. He admired her patience, and still more the brave way she bore up under the misfortunes which had befallen her. She had not been beggared, it is true; this uncle Emile of whom she spoke had already charge of the fortune left her by her father, but at one fell swoop her own private possessions, her wardrobe, her trinkets, those things so dear to every woman of her age, had been torn from her. Yet she never harped upon her loss. What grief she showed was for her black servant, whom Neil never mentioned, but whose body he almost wished he had brought ashore, when he saw the girl looking wistfully at the sea, with unshed tears trembling like beads of dew upon her long lashes.

He guessed her thoughts, and knew well that she felt lonely and depressed, but never a word of comfort passed his lips. He was struggling with himself, for was he not a poor man, who could speak no word of love to any woman, least of all to one who was possessed of ample means? And yet she was dependent on Geoffrey. This was what galled him. No doubt he had written at her request to Monsieur d'Herbois, and knew that she intended repaying his brother, for she made no secret of her wish to be free from any obligation; but, as things were, Geoffrey had some kind of hold upon her, while he

himself was merely a guest, a guest in the old house which had been his home, and which this Anglicized Scot cared nothing about.

Kate Ingleby, however, was interested in it, and this constituted some bond of union between them. She never wearied of listening to what he had to tell her of the history of his clan, of old Ian Darroch, of the Pitlochie smugglers, and even of the great rebellion. Of himself he rarely spoke, and this the girl was quick to note and approve; Geoffrey, on the other hand, was, if amusing and at times interesting, distinctly vainglorious. His talk ran on horses, on cards, duels, and prize-fighters—on the fashionable circles in which he moved, and of which, according to himself, he was no mean ornament.

Neil, who from his brief intercourse with the man had thought him a besotted fool, was forced to alter his views.

Geoffrey Darroch had seen life, and knew how to describe it. In the company of men with whom he had no tastes in common he was dull and rude, but with kindred spirits he was a different being, and the same held true when the spur of vanity goaded him to exertion. It was so now, and it is not to be wondered at that Kate Ingleby found him entertaining. His compliments were delicate enough. Strictly speaking, he was a more taking man than the quiet, clean-shaven advocate, and the American knew nothing to his discredit. Neil saw that she listened to his step-brother attentively, and chafed inwardly. What he did not see—for the cleverest men in his condition are often blind—was that Kate's sharp eyes had penetrated his mask, and that she was amusing herself at his expense.

She could not help it; she was young, unsophisticated, full of health and spirits, and a little intoxicated by the unwonted attentions paid her. Besides, a mixture of French and American blood

is not conducive to the formation of a youthful prude or an old maid, especially when its owner is not yet twenty, has a face and figure fashioned to turn men's heads, and is robed in a costume more befitting the stage than prosaic everyday life.

Therefore, the girl played with fire in perfect innocence, despite her occasional sauciness and glimpses of shrewd mother-wit, and fanned the flame which had already been kindled between the grandsons of Ian Darroch.

It was agreed that Mr. Quill should take charge of Miss Kate, and see to her safe conduct to Paris; but both men devoutly hoped that he would be in no haste to put in an appearance.

Geoffrey had at first been solely influenced by the mention the girl made of her worldly possessions, but he was too much of a sensualist not to be attracted by her uncommon beauty.

Neil's surrender was that of a man who has met his fate. He kept a close watch on himself, however, and fondly believed his secret was his own. Whether his brother guessed the real state of his feelings or not, one thing is certain: unfriendly from the first, each now regarded the other as a rival.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE

CAPTAIN VAN HAGEN, skipper of the smuggling lugger *Tyfel*, was beyond all doubt an extremely ugly man. He was like nothing so much as a huge codfish, with his soft, flabby face, his bulging eyes, distended nose, and great clumsy mouth, which for ever kept opening and shutting as he mechanically chewed tobacco. The resemblance was heightened by the greasy curl of beard, which depended from his chin, and irresistibly

reminded one of the barbule of the foul-feeding cod. His body was rotund but powerful, his legs short, his bodily presence, in fact, contemptible, but he was no fool. An excellent seaman, a good commander, and a daring runner of contraband, he was both callous and rapacious. He was like a fish in soul as well as in face—a cold-blooded, greedy Dutchman, but he had the courage of a pike.

He lay upon his stomach behind one of the rocks on the Croban Point, and with a telescope surveyed the coast-line from the distant Stacks, along the cliffs to the mouth of the Whipple, and the curving sands which ran from the estuary to where the Croban jutted seawards.

One of the Pitlochie gang, no other than the man whom Neil Darroch had sent overboard nearly a fortnight before, crouched by his side, and puffed solemnly at a cutty pipe.

The lugger *Tyfel*, whose colour suited her name, lay at anchor with her topmasts struck to the south of the promontory, and so was concealed from the view of any in Shiachan or Darroch House. As a rule, she hid behind the Stacks, but Captain Van Hagen had been met by a boatload of the free-traders, with the sad information that his old friend Ian Darroch was no more, and that the crofts of Pitlochie were to be deserted.

On receipt of this news, Van Hagen had sworn vigorously, for he had been chased from the Solway, and had on board a valuable cargo of schnapps and other commodities upon which a *verdomde* Government exacted duty.

He was a slow thinker, and so found holding ground for his vessel behind the Croban, and reviewed the situation. It was only an hour after daybreak, but the skipper was an early riser, and had gone ashore with Jan Holland, a man after his own heart, half Dutch, half English, who, after making several voyages with him, had playfully

stabbed a woman in Amsterdam, and found it convenient to reside at the head of Glen Dhu, where all, except Dugald the piper, welcomed so daring and jovial a mariner. His crime had been forgotten by this time, and so he had again gladly shipped with Van Hagen, and had persuaded four of his kidney to join him.

His elegant commander suddenly uttered a grunt, expressive of surprise, and spitting solemnly, handed him the glass.

By its aid Jan Holland perceived the figure of a tall man making its way across the stretch of benty links. It was coming towards the sands, now uncovered and dotted with the black shapes of seabirds busy at their breakfasts. Jan Holland knew the man, and whistled to himself.

It was Neil Darroch.

A thought struck him, and he was about to propose something to the solemn skipper, when that worthy again grunted, though in a higher key. His keen eye had seen something else of interest. Following the direction indicated by a fat forefinger, Jan focussed the glass, and delivered himself of an oath. Another man was abroad at this early hour, heading apparently for the same place. It was the new Laird of Darroch. Jan knew they were stepbrothers, therefore he asked himself why they did not walk together if they must take the air at an hour when gentlefolk are supposed to be abed.

His unspoken question was soon answered. The two men gained the beach at points a few yards apart, raised their hats to each other, and began going through certain movements, which caused Van Hagen's protruding eyes to become yet more prominent, while Jan Holland's pipe went out.

'Strike me blind,' said the former in Dutch, 'if they are not going to fight a duel!' He chortled with pleasure at the prospect. 'Let us get nearer,' said he; 'I smell money this morning. Ha, ha! ho, ho!'

His painted visage became purple as a painted sunset, and rising with difficulty, on account of his bulk and general unwieldiness, he and his companion began to creep cautiously towards the base of the little peninsula of rock. It was not hard to keep themselves effectually hidden behind the mighty blocks and lichen-spotted boulders which, with sea-worn gravel and rounded pebbles, formed the beak-like Croban.

Captain Van Hagen was right. It was an appeal to arms which had kept Geoffrey Darroch awake all night, and dragged both him and Neil from their beds with the first glimpse of light.

The reason is not far to seek. Several things had occurred, any one of them sufficient to rouse Neil Darroch to the fighting point, and it was only his forbearance which had up till now prevented an open rupture. Though he knew it not, Geoffrey had proposed to the girl, and been rejected. That such had been the result of the latter's wooing was not surprising, for his method of making his advances was that in vogue amongst the dissolute set with whom he had unhappily become associated.

What had forced him to hasten his declaration was his jealousy of Neil, and an opportunity which appeared to him too good to be lost. He was deceived by Kate's debonair manner, and thought her a roguish hoyden, who would rather enjoy a liberty being taken with her.

He was undeceived by as sound a box on the ear as ever staggered a forward lover. He had found the girl alone one day, and approaching her on tip-toe, managed to clap his somewhat shaky hands over her eyes. Then, altering his voice, he had asked her to guess who held her captive. Her answer was prompt, and somewhat disconcerting. She mistook him for the half-witted Charles Deschamps.

'Too bad, i' faith, Miss Kate,' said he, releasing her; 'too bad to mix me up with that old ass.'

'It is,' she answered, in a tone which should have been a warning to him. 'I might have known that Monsieur Deschamps would not have done such a thing. And now, how dare you behave in such a way!'

'Tut, tut!' said he. 'Faint heart, you know, Miss Kate. I am going to dare a great deal more, for I'm blessed if I can help myself. Now, what say you? I have my faults, but I'm none so bad at bottom, and egad, my lass! if you'll marry me I can show you a little more of life and gaiety than that cold-blooded, sneering brother of mine. I've watched you, and I want you for yourself, and that's God's truth.'

She let him run on, chiefly because she was too much astonished to check him. When she found words, they were scarcely what Geoffrey had expected.

'You do me too much honour, do you not?' she asked with a flushed cheek, but looking him very straight in the eyes.

'Honour!' said he. 'Oh, honour be—I mean, confound it! Of course you are not English, but that's no matter. I'm in dead earnest; for you're too pretty, and, you see——'

It was then, as he made an effort to clip her round the waist, that he received his well-merited reward.

He had the grace to stifle the oath which rose to his lips, and Kate noticed this act of repression even then. Her treatment had done him good.

'It's late in the day for this kind of thing,' he stammered.

'But not too late, sir. Do you think I am to be insulted because I am here alone and unprotected?'

''Pon honour,' he began, 'I meant nothing.'

'I thought so,' she answered. 'Please keep to that, Mr. Darroch, if you wish me to forget what has passed;' and while Geoffrey was wondering what the deuce she meant, she left him with a tingling ear and a very rueful countenance.

Thinking over the affair afterwards, she was more amused than angry, and wisely let it make no difference in her behaviour, meeting him frankly and without reserve. But it was otherwise with Geoffrey. He did not blame the girl, for his ears had been boxed before, and yet he had won in the long-run, but he put down his present repulse to Neil's influence, and resolved to vent his spleen accordingly. He began with personal insults, but to these Neil paid no heed. His object was to make the house unbearable, and to drive Neil back to his work. He never thought his brother would fight. Somehow he did not associate him with the pistol or the small sword, and so, in the evenings, when all had retired, these two men sat down and wrangled over their wine. Neil kept his temper admirably in check. He would have been wiser to have avoided Geoffrey's company altogether, but he had a mistaken idea that to leave the room would savour of cowardice on his part, and he believed himself strong enough to resist the temptation of slapping the other across the mouth. Indeed, he found a little pleasure in irritating his brother by his silence and contemptuous smiles, which, though highly reprehensible, was perhaps natural enough. An idle man makes love or quarrels if he has an opportunity for either amusement, and Neil, having debarred himself from the former pursuit, found time hang less heavily by indulging in a negative way in the latter.

'So,' began Geoffrey on the night of the final outburst, 'you think you're strong in the running, do you?'

Neil merely raised his glass and scrutinized its contents, holding it between him and the lamplight.

'May I ask why you wear that piece of glass in your eye, sir?' was the next question—one not asked for the first time.

The offending glass was dropped by a slight relaxation of the muscles holding it in position. Geoffrey,

nonplussed for a moment, subsided into silence, but began to drink rapidly and deeply.

A feeling of pity possessed Neil, and he resolved to make an effort to patch up the peace.

'I think,' he said, 'there should be an end to this. We are here but for a short time, and I regret that we are so unfriendly.'

'Go to the devil!' was the polite rejoinder.

'My dear sir,' said Neil, who felt his conscience eased by his attempt at reconciliation, and into whose throat there had suddenly come a feeling of constriction at this bluff rejoinder. 'My dear sir, I prefer not to do so, for if you continue drinking as you are doing, it would necessitate my again meeting you one of these days.'

'God forbid!' said the other. 'I have had enough of you and your breed. You give yourself the airs of a lord, and would rule the roost like that blessed old rogue we planted the other day—and a good job too, let me tell you.'

'Have a care,' said Neil, into whose eyes had sprung the light of battle. 'You would do well to keep your foul tongue off the dead.'

'I would have you know,' cried Geoffrey, 'that I cannot tolerate you longer. This place is mine, sir'—he rapped violently upon the table—'and you have been here on sufferance, remember that.'

'I am not likely to forget it,' said Neil bitterly.

'Very well, then you will oblige me by clearing out to-morrow.'

'I regret that I must refuse to do any such thing.'

'Confound your impertinence!' hiccoughed Geoffrey. 'I demand it! I order it, sir! You may be thankful I don't say this very night.'

'There is no need to bluster,' said Neil quietly. 'You are not dealing with a child. What is more, you are not yet confirmed in possession, and further, Miss Ingleby has to be considered. At present you are no fit companion for a lady.'

'Blast you, sir! I believe you put her up to box my ears.'

'Box your ears! Believe me, I did not know she had done anything so fitting. I have no doubt it was well deserved.'

At this Geoffrey, savage and annoyed at the slip of the tongue which in his drunken folly had placed him still further at the mercy of Neil's sarcasm, cast caution to the winds, lost his head, and poured out a torrent of filthy abuse. He cast Neil's ancestry in his teeth, he made base insinuations, he ranted and cursed. It was painful to see his flushed face and reddened eyes; it was impossible to endure his language.

Anxious to avoid extremes, Neil rose to leave the room, but as he passed his brother's chair the latter seized his coat-tails, and hung on to them, roaring with senseless laughter.

'You pale-faced, white-livered hound!' he began, 'I know what you're after! Sit down and be —— to you!'

'Let go,' said Neil quietly, 'or it will be the worse for you.'

Many men can stand a railing tongue, but let a hand be laid on them, and they are up in arms at once.

By way of answer Geoffrey tugged fiercely at the cloth, and Neil, losing his balance, was sent sprawling backwards upon the table. He was on his feet in an instant, and picking up Geoffrey's glass, which, for a wonder, had not been upset, without a second thought he dashed its contents in his brother's face.

The change was ludicrous.

The red wine streamed down the red-veined cheeks of the toper and dropped upon his linen. He choked and spluttered, half of it having caught him in the throat and ended his merriment. But the dose did him good, as the box on the ear had done;

it brought out what of the man there was in him; and that is how, at a distance of twenty paces, each with a pistol in his hand and another lying loaded at his feet, with no seconds, and with, as they thought, no witnesses, the grandsons of the old Jacobite faced one another, intent on settling their differences with powder and shot.

Neither was in a happy frame of mind, but one alone appeared agitated.

No man can drink brandy to excess and have a clear head and a steady hand, and when in addition that man has an accusing conscience and a cool and collected adversary, his nerves are not likely to be composed.

So Geoffrey Darroch sweated with anxiety rather than fear, despite the cold, and Neil, looking into his face, could find it in his heart to pity him. He had no intention of trying to kill the man who reigned in Ian Darroch's stead, but he hoped to give him a lesson and make him apologize, for Neil prided himself on his obstinacy and grim determination. He was yet to learn how futile these might be, how a man may be stripped naked of all his little fads, his accumulated mannerisms and oddities, ay, and be broken in spirit and bereft even of intellect itself, by relentless Fate.

Although without experience in affairs of honour, he was a good marksman. Half his time as a boy had been spent in amusing himself with one of those fine steel pistols, claw-butted and inlaid with silver, which Highland gentlemen carried as far as Derby, and used in vain on the moor of Drummossie.

He had himself well under control; he had right on his side, but he was miserable. He knew now how madly he loved Kate Ingleby. He was astonished at his own ardour, this man who sneered at the sex and had known only how frail they could become. He had reasoned and argued

with this insane fancy, as at first he called it, but in vain. That sweetly serious face with the merry hazel eyes, that voice with its faint drawl and its powers of song, the lissom, upright figure, the girl's naïveté, her want of conventionalism and stiffness, and airs and graces, all held him in thraldom.

And now he was going to run the risk of leaving her for ever. An interest had come into his life, the life he might be about to quit. He shook himself free of such gloomy thoughts. He would not, he could not, believe it. He had fashioned his own character with the greatest care, and was the work of years to be snuffed out by yonder bulky, roystering toper, who openly laughed at his father's country, and made a mock of everything he held sacred?

'Nonsense!' he told himself, as he removed his hat, buttoned his coat tightly to the throat, and saw to his priming.

As there was no one to give the signal, Geoffrey had proposed a plan to which Neil had agreed. Each was to have two pistols, one placed on the sand, the other held in the hand. Each was to discharge the latter in the air and then to stoop, pick up the remaining weapon, and as rapidly as possible to take aim and fire.

Naturally enough, on hearing this curious suggestion, Neil had demurred. He would have to rely wholly on the honour of his step-brother. He quietly said as much to Geoffrey, but he had mistaken his man.

'Pardon me, Mr. Darroch,' the latter had replied, with the gravity of a half-sobered man, 'I recognise I am dealing with a person of birth, even if he be half a foreigner and a Scotch lawyer. I trust you. Is it, therefore, too much to ask you to believe that I shall act in good faith?'

Neil had regarded him with amazement. The man was transformed. He now spoke without

using foul language, and his speech had the ring of truth about it.

Neil recognised that, after all, this step-brother might have some spark of the gentleman in his composition. He merely bowed his assent. Never had he felt so drawn to his relative.

'Humph!' he commented; 'he has some of the old man's blood in him after all, it would appear; but he needs a lesson, and he'll get it.'

That lesson was to be very different from what Neil imagined.

Captain Van Hagen and Jan had an excellent view of the encounter. They were surprised, and the former was disgusted, to see both men fire in the air, but as each stooped rapidly the skipper understood and grinned his approval.

Like one report sounded the discharge of the second pistols, but one man alone fell, tottering backwards and sinking to the sand as his knees gave way.

It was Jan Holland's turn to grin. His debt was paid, in part at least.

Geoffrey Darroch stood like one dazed, with the smoking weapon in his hand. Then, as he saw the motionless figure stretched out before him, the pistol dropped from his grasp; he gave a shuddering sigh, half of relief, half of horror, and approached the body, his limbs trembling, his face ashen, his very lips white and dry. He was bending over it when he heard the sound of soft, pattering footsteps. He looked quickly up. A tall man was running towards him, and behind him waddled another, who at that moment shouted out something which Geoffrey could not understand.

But he did not wait. Turning, he made off along the beach as fast as his legs could carry him. He was possessed by a wild, unreasoning terror; he would have screamed aloud had he had any breath to spare.

He looked quickly up.—Page 82.

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And he might have spared it, for he had not a chance with the long-legged, hardy smuggler, who ran him down in thirty yards, and gripped him by the collar.

'Gently, my hearty!' said he; 'there's no one going to harm ye. What! would ye?' for the frightened man began to struggle violently, and was no easy prey. But he was too late. Up panted Van Hagen to the aid of his comrade.

'Mein Gott!' he exclaimed, 'what a fuss abood nodings! Tell him what it is we do want, Jan, and put no price on him till I haben time to think.'

They led Geoffrey up to Neil, who lay where he had fallen, a smear of blood upon his forehead.

'See if he is dead, Jan; I will watch de gentlemans.'

Thus adjured, Jan knelt down and made a hasty examination.

'Queer,' said he; 'dash my buttons if ever I seed the like! The ball took him on the temple, just on the edge, but it's glanced off—flay me! but it's been touch and go,' he added; 'he's not dead, only stunned, but pretty bad, I should say.'

'Damn!' was Captain Van Hagen's sole remark.

'It's all right,' said Jan, nodding at their captive, who seemed dazed and stupefied; 'he wants to get rid o' him, and there's the lugger. Why not give him a passage, skipper?'

'Jan,' said the captain solemnly, and in Dutch, 'you are a genius, my boy; tell him.'

'Look here, you,' said Jan; 'Van Hagen here says I be a genius, and d'ye know why?'

Geoffrey, whose scattered wits were returning, looked at him with an air of relief.

'He is alive, did you say?' he asked.

'Ay, ay, he'll do,' said Jan; 'but listen to me as you value your hide.'

Thereupon Geoffrey was made acquainted with many things; learned who the fat man was who

stood and puffed and chewed beside him; heard of his grandfather's doings, and finally listened to an offer made him by Jan.

'If ye don't agree he may die,' said that logician; 'then where'll you be, I should like to know? If he pegs out on the lugger, no one's the wiser, and they'll think the Pitlochie lads played the trick on him. If he lives, we won't hurt him, bless your heart; but a voyage will help his constitootion and heal his wound. Meanwhile, you splice the girl and clear out.'

He laughed coarsely.

'Ho, ho!' bellowed Van Hagen. 'So a little bird is de cause? Dooble de price, Jan, dooble de price.'

'Hold your row, man!' said Jan; 'the figger's moderate. Now then, what d'ye say?'

The wretched man was in a trap; the offer was tempting.

'But I have no money here,' he protested.

'That don't matter; we'll take the watch and chain, thank 'ee. Hold on, though, that ain't enough.'

'You can't come near the house,' said Geoffrey in alarm; 'you'll be seen by someone.'

'Bless your heart! can't we? Don't ye know there's a passage to the cellars from the caves?'

'What!' cried Geoffrey.

'To be sure; that's the way your precious old cuss of an ancestor scared the sogers. We'll be at the trap-door at twelve this blessed night, ay, and a dozen men behind us, so no monkeying, Mister Laird. See and be there with the yellow boys, or it's in Portroy you'll be in the morning.'

'Curse you!' snarled Geoffrey, thoroughly cowed, and with that they let him go.

Securing the pistols, they raised the unconscious man, bore him carefully to their boat, and hoisted him on board the *Tyfel*.

'Beautiful!' said Captain Van Hagen; 'by to-

night he will be dead—you understand me, Jan?—den de price will be doobled.'

And Jan Holland's wink was evidence of his comprehension.

It was a wretched being that slunk across the links and fields to Darroch House. Once a weak man stoops to evil, there is no saying where he may end. Geóffrey had been guilty of many minor crimes; he had been known to cheat at cards and on the turf. His reputation where women were concerned was bad; but so far, as Neil had found, he had not wholly abandoned every principle of honour and virtue. Now he had gone a step further.

Before the duel, and even as he faced his brother, he had no clear idea as to what he wanted to do. His brain was fuddled, and the matter had risen so suddenly, that he had been hurried into a demand for satisfaction. His conduct all along had been that of a drunken and irritated man, but it had recoiled on his own head with a vengeance.

He was sobered at last, and in a fine dilemma. He cursed his folly, but that did not help him.

It must be confessed that he thought little of poor Neil. His consternation was entirely for himself. His available funds were at a very low ebb, and this bargain into which he had been forced would absorb half his ready money.

Then again, if the arrangement were discovered, he would have to make himself scarce. He dreaded to think of what the fishermen would do if they heard of his transaction. To fight a duel was one thing, to wound a man and then pay to have him kidnapped, was quite another. He must brazen it out, he told himself, and approached the house with the greatest care, hiding behind bushes and surveying the premises before he ventured nearer. To his relief no one was stirring. On tip-toe he made his way within and reached his room without having seen or heard anything to cause him alarm.

But a pair of suspicious eyes had marked his every movement.

The damaged brain rests uneasily. The half-witted are poor sleepers as a rule, and Monsieur Deschamps was no exception. Geoffrey was unaware that the old man would frequently be up and about at cock-crow, even in the cold winter mornings, and thus he had slipped past the hall-door without an idea that it was slightly ajar, and that a face was surveying him through the narrow chink. It was the same puckered and vacant face which a moment before had been peering through a little clear space in a clouded pane of glass, and had noted his cautious approach.

Monsieur Deschamps might have a want, but he could put two and two together in a feeble way, and he hated and feared this new master even more than the old, who had not troubled him for long before his death.

'I must tell Neil,' he mumbled. 'Why does he creep like a fox? He is bad, very bad, but Charles Deschamps knows something! Hee! hee!'

His face wrinkled with pleasure, and he gave a little skip of delight as he shuffled off to feed his friends the fowls. He would talk to them for hours at a time.

Meanwhile, Geoffrey Darroch was wondering what course of action he should adopt. Knowing that the American was unacquainted with Neil's handwriting, he was on the point of composing a letter to her purporting to come from his step-brother, and stating that pressing business required his immediate return.

'Egad!' he muttered, 'I could even make it an affectionate farewell—deeply regret—hope ere long—shall ever remember, and so forth.' He gave a mockery of a laugh, a hollow laugh, which betrayed his state of miserable indecision, the pricking of a guilty conscience. 'Great Cæsar! though, that will not do!' he told himself. 'It would be damning

evidence if anything leaked out. No, no! I must appear as surprised as they will be. Then there's the housekeeper. She won't count for much, however.'

His hand trembled so much that he could not shave. He cursed at his condition and steadied his nerves temporarily in a way which was growing upon him, and ruining him, body and soul. But for the present the brandy did him good: his courage returned, and there was nothing about him to attract special attention when Kate Ingleby met him at the breakfast-table.

She was looking her best that morning. The effect of the terrible struggle for life had worn off, and as the memory of the wreck began to grow dim —it takes a heavy loss to tell for long on the young and healthy—her spirits rose, and she was again the same vivacious lass whose natural brightness a dull and dreary life had not been able to quench.

What added to her attractiveness was the fact that there was something of an unconscious challenge in the flash of her gay eyes, in the poise of her head, in her very speech. It was the same attitude, with, indeed, the unconscious element deleted, which her country has adopted since ever it became a nation.

But surely there was something more, else whence came a certain old-world grace, a touch of hauteur, that pursing of a pretty mouth, that firm, rounded chin, that dignity of carriage, which tells its own story? Beyond a doubt these were her legacy from France—not the France of the sans-culotte and the guillotine, not the France of the Empire, with its hybrids and its foreigners, but the vanished France, which somehow suggests stately minuets and light, tinkling music, and love and gallantry, and aristocrats galore.

'By Jove!' thought Geoffrey. 'It was worth doing to win her, hang me if it wasn't!'

He noticed the quick glance she gave round the room, and rightly interpreted its meaning.

'My brother has not yet put in an appearance,' he said.

'Oh!' she answered lightly, with a pardonable duplicity, 'I was wondering if the lawyer with the queer name had come.'

'Mr. Quill? Come, come, Miss Ingleby! Then you wish to leave us? That is too bad, 'pon honour it is!'

'No, no!' she replied earnestly; 'it is not that, but I am trespassing on your kindness.'

He made a gesture of dissent.

'Yes, but I am,' she retorted. 'I have a terrible appetite, I know.'

'It is a pleasure,' he protested.

'To be eaten out of house and home?' she said gaily. 'You are too polite, Mr. Darroch. Now, Neil'—it was wonderful how glibly the name fell from her lips—'would have agreed with me. Are there many men like him in this country?'

The question staggered him. He reddened under her frank gaze.

'I do believe you are jealous!' she laughed. 'Fie! fie! "Let brotherly love continue," you know. But I am hungry. I wish he would be quick. Why, my old friend is not here, either!'

Her words tortured him.

'Let us start without them,' he said in a voice the hoarseness of which he hid by a cough.

'I reckon they deserve it,' she answered; 'but here they come, I think.'

The door opened, and Charles Deschamps entered.

'Come away, you lazy old man!' she cried. 'Late, but not last.'

He shuffled in, bowed coldly to Geoffrey, and with much *empressement* to the girl. She noticed that he was flushed, that his eyes were bright, that his usual well-bred, if meaningless, smile was absent.

'You have been out?' she queried,

'Yes, yes,' he said quickly. 'And not I only.'

Geoffrey started.

'Could the fool have seen him?' he asked himself. 'Pshaw!' he exclaimed inwardly; 'impossible!'

But he felt far from comfortable.

'Was Mr. Neil with you?' asked Kate.

But the old man did not seem to hear her. He had one of his strange fits upon him, and ate little, fumbling at his mouth with his long taper fingers, and fidgeting on his seat.

The meal proceeded in silence.

'It's very curious,' said Geoffrey after a time, 'that he has not come down, though we sat up late last night. With your leave I shall go and see.'

He rose and hurriedly left the room.

At once the old Frenchman's manner changed. He leaned across the table towards the girl.

'Why was he out?' he asked in French. 'Mademoiselle, why was he out?'

'Who?' she asked, bewildered.

But he did not answer. Getting up without any apology—a thing most unusual with him—he hesitated a moment and then followed Geoffrey from the room.

BOOK II.

THE TRIAL

CHAPTER I.

FROM LUGGER TO FRIGATE

NEIL DARROCH came to himself when the lugger *Tyfel* had been three days at sea. He was lying on his back in some dark place, some gloomy, ill-smelling hole, full of a multitude of sounds—creakings and squeakings, sharp raps and heavier blows—while he became conscious of a swaying movement, regular and sickening, which could not be mistaken. He was on board a ship. His head was strangely dull and heavy. He raised a hand to his brow, and found a cloth bound round it. His eyelids felt as if their lashes were of lead, so weighty did they seem, so great was their tendency to droop and shut out his vision. It was with a conscious effort he kept his eyes open, and this first voluntary action since he fell upon the sands stimulated his brain to greater exertions. He began to think, and at once experienced pain. Still he persevered, and memory returned to him. He recalled the quarrel, the duel, everything, down to the whip-like crack of his first pistol. Then how came he to be in this place? he asked himself. There was no fear in his question; he was too languid, too

drowsy, to trouble about it, and in this condition he lay yet another day, while the *Tyfel* threshed into head-seas, and tacked for the Solway.

Captain Van Hagen had a humorous, or rather, a farcical, side to his objectionable character. That is no doubt the reason Neil's quizzing-glass had taken his fancy. He had dispensed with the riband, and now one of his fish-like orbs surveyed Jan Holland through it, much to that worthy's admiration.

'And how is the gentlemans to-day, Jan?' he asked as he rolled along his quarterdeck.

Clumsy and uncouth on land, the skipper was at home on his beloved planking. His short legs, set wide apart, swayed to every motion of the vessel; he moved, if not with grace, at least with wonderful activity and a jaunty step when at sea. He was built to withstand a nor'-easter, and to stagger on inclined planes.

'Jean Maban says he is better,' answered his mate, 'but that his temper is growing worse. He wants to know where the devil he is, and what has become of his fine clothes.'

'Boor man!' said Captain Van Hagen with mock pity. 'It is sad that he is so silly.'

Whereupon both master and mate laughed heartily. But their merriment ended abruptly, for from where they stood they could see a tall figure, clad in a seaman's togs, emerge from the forecastle.

'Strike me blind!' exclaimed the skipper, 'but here he does come! His head-bones must be thick, Jan.'

It was indeed Neil, who, a prey to doubt and uncertainty, had been unable to rest, and so, though he felt far from well, his head aching sorely, his mouth dry and fevered, he had resolved to get to the bottom of the mystery.

Repression of all emotion was with him a creed. He had schooled himself in it till he fondly imagined himself a Stoic. Therein he was mistaken. Such a philosophy is impossible for the Celt. The Teuton

and the Slav, the Englishman more especially, may make himself well-nigh perfect in the art of self-control, but the Highlander will rarely succeed. Neil's acquired coolness and reserve had so far served him well enough, but they had never been put to the test. In the course of his reading he had encountered situations which he was wont to consider critically. He had found it entertaining to imagine how he would behave in this and that extremity. He was to find—to learn by bitter experience—that theory is vastly different from practice. Still his allies—for such they had become—were not to desert him immediately. From the little he had gathered, he suspected that he was the victim of foul play, and he determined to carry things with a high hand.

On reaching the open air, he paused and looked about him. He recognised at once that he was on one of those smuggling craft which at rare intervals used to appear off the coast, and with which he knew his grandfather had been wont to have dealings. There was no sign of land from her deck—nothing but a vast expanse of gray sea tipped with white, through which she was running fast and easily under a press of canvas. He noticed the two men standing on her poop, and paying no attention to some of the crew who were watching him curiously, he made his way aft with the clumsiness of a landsman. His first act as he reached them was characteristic of the man.

'Pardon me,' he said with the greatest politeness, 'but that is my property;' and to their astonishment, he plucked his glass from the eye of Captain Van Hagen, and after wiping it on the cloth of a rough pea-jacket he wore, transferred it to his own.

There was something so audacious in the act, something so masterful about this tall, gaunt man, who looked scarcely able to keep his feet, that for a moment the Dutch skipper was nonplussed. Then,

with a curse and a quick motion, he snatched at the glass, and pitched it overboard.

'That, sir,' said Neil, 'I consider an impertinence;' but even as he spoke a lurch of the vessel would have upset him had not Jan Holland, with no gentle hand, caught him by the arm.

Neil's bold front, however, was his salvation.

'Strike me blind!' said Van Hagen, 'but he is a brave man, and not like de oder. Jan, you ——, what you laugh at?'

'I presume you refer to Mr. Darroch?' said Neil.

'Oh, tell him, Jan; tell him all. It will do no harm,' chuckled the skipper.

Jan Holland had been promising himself much joy in the way of repaying Neil for the bath he had given him, but he saw that this man with the thin lips and the grim, dark face was not to be trifled with, and that already he had found his way into Van Hagen's good graces. Moreover, he also could admire courage in whatever form, and so, mentally cancelling his debt, which indeed had been more than repaid, he proceeded with the greatest *sang froid* to recount the incidents which had led to Neil's appearance on the lugger. The latter listened quietly. He showed no sign of the wrath which possessed him, but it was well for Geoffrey Darroch that he was nowhere within reach.

The unhappy man could have groaned with misery and fear when he had heard all—fear, not for himself, but for the girl left in the clutches of such a scoundrel as he found his step-brother to be.

'And this is his honour,' he said to himself.

He had escaped with his life by a miracle, but no thought of thankfulness crossed his mind. As for the men before him, he did not blame them. Indeed, when he heard that they had told Geoffrey he was dead, and forced him to disgorge a double sum, he joined in their mirth; but his was a terrifying laugh, so fierce, so tuneless, that even Van Hagen

paused and looked doubtfully at him. He did not want a maniac on board his ship.

'You will put me ashore?' said Neil, as if he were giving an order.

'Strike me blind, but I will!' said the skipper. 'I would give half de money to see de second fight. Jan,' he added in Dutch, 'tell him to come to the cabin and drink grog with me; he is a man after my own heart, and his watch and chain will pay for his passage—ho, ho! ha, ha!'

Captain Van Hagen meant what he said, but 'l'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.' Foiled in his attempt to land a cargo at the Cowrie Caves, he again headed for the Solway, and for the last time in his existence.

That very night they made the land and crept cautiously in towards the rocky Wigtownshire coast, with a blue light at the forepeak, and a flare in the bows, as signals to their accomplices on shore.

The *Tyfel* was running a great risk; for her commander did not know but that the cutter to which he had given the slip might not be in the neighbourhood; but the stakes were high, and he had the gambling spirit.

His signals were answered, and presently the lugger came to an anchorage; boats were lowered, and they began to transfer her cargo. Van Hagen, having been assured that the coast was clear, went ashore with half his men, leaving Jan in charge, while Neil received a promise that he would be landed in the dinghy at some distance away, as the free-traders would not be inclined to welcome him along with the kegs and bales.

His prospects were gloomy enough. He was still weak, and he was without money; his clothes had been put up to auction for the benefit of the crew, and he had no idea how he was to get to Glasgow, which must be his first step. But he was feverishly impatient to start off; his fingers were itching to be

at Geoffrey's throat; he tortured himself with thoughts of what might have happened in his absence.

As he waited, there suddenly came a great uproar from the direction of the shore; lights flickered through the darkness, faint shouts and cries were borne to his ears.

The crew, who were already armed, a motley set, of many nations and languages, became instantly excited and thronged to the side nearest the land, listening to those noises which told of a desperate struggle.

But Jan Holland was an old bird, and knew that such an attack was likely to be supported. He gave orders for all lights to be dowsed, and set his men to work to clear away the long Tom, which, loaded to the muzzle, might have saved the lugger.

He was too late. A hail came from the dark haze which shrouded the sea, from a couple of boats full of revenue men, who with muffled oars had slipped down upon the *Tyfel*.

It was answered by a dropping fire, and the smugglers strove like fiends to get their heavy carronade slewed into position.

Before they succeeded, with a rousing cheer the launches made their dash, and the cutter's men were scrambling aboard.

A confused fight began, but it ended quickly. The lugger's hawser was severed with a hatchet, and she began to drift with the tide. Her crew were driven below, Neil Darroch amongst them, and the *Tyfel* was the prize of His Majesty's cutter *Vigilant*.

As for Captain Van Hagen, he was like a fish in death as in life. He was taken cunningly in a net, and ere long, like the angler's sign, he dangled from a pole, being hanged in chains in the market-place of Dumfries.

Meanwhile the *Vigilant's* commander, in high good-humour at the success of his ruse (he had

transformed his cutter into the sailing image of a dirty collier, and boldly returned to the Solway in broad daylight), sent a prize-crew on board his capture, in charge of an old gray-haired lieutenant and a master's mate. They quickly weeded out the unmistakable foreigners amongst the smugglers and transferred them to the cutter. The remainder were clapped below under hatches, for the lugger was to be run round to the Mersey, and there no doubt a King's ship would be found only too pleased to receive aboard so sturdy a set of rogues.

Neil Darroch had mustered with the rest, and when he found he was in danger of being mistaken for one of the *Tyfel's* crew, his consternation may be imagined. The tide was favourable, the wind would serve, and things were being done in a hurry.

He saw he must protest at once. Stepping forward, a tremor of anxiety in his voice which he could not conceal, 'I trust you do not include me?' he began.

'Eh, what's that?' said the officer. 'No time to listen to you, my man; thank your stars you're not on shore with the horse soldiers prodding your back. Stand out of the way now.'

'But, sir,' entreated Neil.

Jan Holland, who was standing in the line, savage in temper, with a broken arm and a badly cut head, called out at this moment:

'Never heed him; he's queer in the noddle, since he was hurt in a tussle; thinks he's a gent, he does.'

'None of your blarney!' answered the lieutenant. 'That's all right—seven of the devils; get them below.'

His orders were speedily obeyed, and Neil, with a feeling of intense dismay, was bundled down the companion stairs.

Before morning broke, he was again at sea, ill and down-hearted, his only satisfaction, a poor one at the best, being that Jan Holland was delirious.

The next two days he endured the misery of that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick.

The shock had been such that his rage mastered him, and he stormed at both lieutenant and master's mate as they made their inspection on the day following the capture.

The former, coarse and sour-tempered, three parts full of rum, and puffed up by his new command, made a mock of him, laughing at his threats and hot words, and vowing—for another of the Pitlochie men had lied to him—that he knew how to handle Highland cattle, and hinting that a rope's end was a salutary cure for a grumbler.

His second in command, a sneak and toady, took his cue from his superior officer, and Neil found it hard to restrain himself from assaulting them. They seemed to find infinite amusement in his rage and distress. They were of the nature that rejoices in a bull-baiting or a badger-drawing—that fine old English stock whose memory we associate with a sweet savour of beer-pots and coarse tobacco, the rubicund, pimple-faced, foul-mouthed set with whom we are acquainted from the old prints and from many a book-picture. God knows they were brave enough, blustering, free-handed, broad-backed rogues, those of them who followed the sea, without reverence for anything in earth or heaven, devoted solely to their victuals and their bottles, and, when it suited them, their duty.

'Damn all Frenchmen, and down with the rum!' was their motto, and they acted up to it and very much beyond it.

To a man with the refined susceptibilities of Neil Darroch, a man who, besides, had those innate feelings of a gentleman characteristic of the poorest and humblest of that old class of Celt which have long since passed away—stamped out by town life and nineteenth-century civilization—those swilling rough-tongued salts were like brute beasts.

He had no eye for any good points they might possess; their vulgarity sickened him. He did not understand their habits, and this, his first introduction to the English seaman, made him remember without wonder his grandfather's hatred of the whole race.

The crew, he found, were little better. They were ill-conditioned, surly, and fond of a rude joke, smart enough, no doubt, when the occasion demanded, but at other times lazy and quarrelsome, a type common in the smaller vessels of the navy, where the discipline was often slack, the officers middle-aged and disappointed, and the men sick of their smuggler-catching trade.

Realizing at last the hopelessness of his present position, Neil resigned himself to the inevitable, devoutly hoping that some way of escape might be opened up to him; for if, as his comrades in misfortune predicted, he was made over to some outward-bound ship-of-war, and if her officers were of the same class as those into whose hands he had fallen, then indeed his lot would be unbearable. He worried himself into a fever, and it was a good thing for him that his scalp wound—due, fortunately, to a small bullet, and unassociated with injury to any vessel—was in process of healing, thanks to a liberal application of friar's balsam and a healthy constitution; otherwise his mental state would have reacted most unfavourably upon it.

From the King's men, who were friendly enough to the prisoners, he learned when they might expect to make the land; and there happened something which gave him the very opportunity he was praying for, and which he almost despaired of obtaining.

Jan Holland died. Less lucky than Neil, or with a thinner skull, a cutlass had fractured his brain-pan, and, after raving blasphemously for four-and-twenty hours, he had sunk into coma and slipped his cable.

As it was towards evening he drew his last breath, and as the lieutenant expected to come to an anchorage in a few hours, when it would be advisable to get a surgeon to view the corpse, they wrapped the once bold Jan in a fold of canvas.

The body lay in a kind of upper hold, where the smugglers were confined, and not one of these hardy rascals seemed to care much about it. They dropped off to sleep, which, with very moderate eating and drinking, was their sole occupation, unless, indeed, they meditated; but this was, to say the least, doubtful.

Not so, however, with Neil. He saw, or thought he saw, a feasible plan. It was repulsive to him, but the beggar may not be a chooser. As much as possible he had held aloof from the other men, sleeping, or, rather, trying to sleep, in a separate corner, and holding little communication with them. As a reward for his marked objection to their manners and conversation, they had kindly shifted Jan's body from their midst to his private nook, if such a word can be applied to a place absolutely devoid of comfort. It was this put the idea in his head. The place was as dark as pitch, and he had made a point of resenting their hideous joke.

Hurriedly, yet as gently as possible, he dragged the sheet away from the corpse, propped it up against the bulkhead, dragging a bandage which circled its scalp down over its face. He was thankful then that he also was wounded. With a shudder of disgust he lay down upon the canvas and gathered it about him. As may be imagined, he could not rest. His hearing seemed intensely acute; every sense was on the *qui vive* as he thus simulated the dead man.

While it was yet night, indeed, in a very short time, he could tell, from the cessation of motion, that the lugger had come to moorings. He heard the clatter and rub of the cable in the hawse-hole, the distant splash of the anchor, the stamp of men's

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feet on the deck above. Then his heart almost ceased beating. He held his breath as he became conscious that somebody was approaching.

'Where is the ——?' said a voice, with that terrible blasphemy which in those days was half a seaman's conversation, and which meant absolutely nothing.

'Gawd knows, Bill!' came the answer. 'These be pretty tough uns—all asleep, every man Jack o' them.'

A lantern flashed its light here and there.

'Split my planks if he beant shoved up beside the daft cuss, what looks half dead hisself! See him, lad?'

'Never mind him,' growled the other. 'Get the corpse on deck, and hurry up. Wonder the old man didn't heave it over hours ago.'

'Has to see the doctor, sonny. Much good that'll do him! And old Figgis, he wouldn't have him lumbering up the deck. Are ye ready? Then heave, my hearty. Gawd! but he's heavy, and hardly stiff.'

Neil, keeping himself as rigid as he could, and imitating the inertness of the dead, felt himself borne upstairs amongst oaths and grumbles, and finally deposited with a bump on the planking. He waited till all was again silent, then, separating the coarse folds of Jan Holland's winding-sheet, he peered out. He recognised he was lying in the bows of the lugger, close by the root of the bowsprit.

Cautiously he raised himself and freed his head of what, to his almost morbid imagination, seemed clammy and chill. The fore-deck was deserted. The night was cold, dark and clear, but an irregular black outline showed him in what direction lay the land. In a second he was clear of his wrapping, had crept to the side, found the anchor-rope, and was afloat. There was a current running, as he

could tell by the way his legs drifted when he hung on by his hands alone. It would carry him away from the vessel, he noted.

He hesitated no longer, and, sinking to his shoulders, struck out. The water was bitterly cold, but he was an excellent swimmer. His shoes he had slipped off, and fastened by their laces round his neck. He paddled easily till he got a notion of the real direction of the tide. To his joy he found it would aid him in reaching the shore; then softly yet swiftly he ploughed his way through the gently ruffled water, rejoicing in his liberty, and leaving the lugger *Tyfel* silent as the grave.

CHAPTER II.

AN ORDER TO KEEL-HAUL.

NEIL DARROCH was dripping wet, soaked to the skin with brine, and wearied beside. He had not the ghost of an idea as to where he was save that he stood on a stretch of sand lapped by the sea from which he had just emerged. Nothing was visible but a twinkle of light half a mile off-shore, a sparkle of yellow in the blackness of night.

Neil shook his clenched fist at it and laughed aloud, for he knew it to come from the masthead lantern of the lugger from which he had just escaped. He was free once more, free to make his way back and bring the man who had foully wronged him to an account. But he was in a miserable plight. It was long before feeling returned to his numbed toes and fingers, but even after his blood was coursing freely he kept going as rapidly as he could, though he had to moderate his pace when he came to the end of the sand stretch and got amongst rocks, ridges, and pebbles.

Finding at last that, what with pools, boulders, and slippery sea-tangle, there was considerable danger in thus stumbling quickly along in the darkness, he struck inland, and eventually, after crossing several fields and ditches, he came upon a high-road which ran parallel with the shore.

It was a matter of indifference which direction he took, and so he walked blindly on, meeting no one, and every moment of his discomfort adding to his rage. Had any footpads thought fit to stop him, they would have found him an ugly customer that night; but the place seemed deserted, and it was with some surprise that, after mounting a stiffish hill, he saw lights away below him. From their number and their close setting, he surmised that he had come upon a considerable town, in all probability a seaport.

He stopped to consider his position. His clothes were not his own, and were still damp, all except his jacket, which he had managed to keep fairly dry. He was absolutely penniless; he was ignorant of his whereabouts, though he fancied he must have landed somewhere on the Welsh or English coast. It might take him weeks to work his way home, and meanwhile Kate, young and thoughtless, might fall a victim to Geoffrey's villainy. He ground his teeth at the idea of such a thing, and hugged to himself the anticipation of the surprise and dismay he would produce in a certain blackguard when he reappeared at Darroch House.

But all this brought him no nearer a solution of his difficulty. He must find food and shelter, and he resolved to be neither timid nor punctilious. A bold face and assured manner, he was convinced, would, as on the lugger, serve him best, and if payment was demanded at once, he could part with some portion of his clothing, even his shoes, which happened to be of good leather. He was beginning to feel exhausted, though it is wonderful how a great

anger will sustain a man, and carry him through the most hazardous enterprises. To some it is a stronger tonic than love or jealousy.

He stopped at the first house with a signboard that he came across. Though the night was now black as Erebus, the hour was none so late, and there was a cheery light streaming from the broad window, the lower part of which was screened. Neil entered a passage, and from it passed into a kind of bar-parlour with a sanded floor and a couple of tables. The air was heavy with tobacco smoke, but the room was warm, though far from clean. A coarse-featured woman was apparently its presiding genius, and its other tenants consisted of three villainous-looking gentry in greasy clothes and fur caps with ear-protectors, who looked up from their mugs as if startled at his entrance.

It was not surprising that the men looked startled. In the first place, their conversation was of a strictly private nature. They had no desire to be overheard. In the second, Neil Darroch presented a sufficiently curious appearance. He was a very tall man, and the clothes which had been given him in lieu of his own were meant for the average seaman, who tends to be short, whatever his bulk. It was part of the men's business to study the mariner, and they were aware of this fact, and recognised an out-of-the-way type in this big lean fellow. Moreover, they noted that his trousers had been soaking wet not so very long ago, and, with the keen sense of their kind, they began to smell a mystery.

'Frinch leave,' whispered one of them, and winked expressively.

Neil scarcely noticed them. He was tired, uncomfortable, and hungry, and sat down in a corner, where presently the woman took his orders, looking somewhat askance at him, but, to his relief, not asking to see the colour of his money.

He was making good play with his knife and fork

as one of the men slipped out quietly, and he did not pay any attention to his exit, nor to the entrance of a squat little man, with a roll in his walk, and the bronzed face of a voyager.

The latter seemed disposed to be friendly. He took a seat near Neil, and, calling for a glass of hot grog, surveyed the premises with a cheerful smile. His glance lit upon the two greasy characters, who had produced a pack of dirty cards, and he whistled softly to himself, and changed his seat, so that he faced them. He caught Neil's eye as he did so, and stuck his tongue into his cheek, and made a sign with his thumb which Neil could not interpret. It would have been a good thing for him if he had.

'Evening, mate,' said the little man. 'Junk and duff good here?'

Neil smiled at his manner of speech.

'Passable,' he said.

'Eh?'

'Passable,' he repeated.

'Blamed if I know the word,' said the questioner; 'but ye stow 'em well. Are ye at moorings?'

'No,' said Neil. 'I came in just before you.'

'Humph!' said the little man. 'Ye'll have your certificate on you?'

'Not I!' replied Neil, wondering what he meant.

'No? Then ye had best keep an eye on them dirty dogs. There's a frigate in the offing, and there's been boats moving about.'

'What do you mean?' asked Neil, for the man spoke in a low voice, and had a mysterious air about him.

'Crimps,' whispered the other.

'You're making a mistake,' said Neil. 'I'm not a sailor.'

'No offence, mate—no offence; but from your duds I would have said we were of a trade, and, anyhow, them darned press-gangs is none too pertikler. If I were you, I would make myself scarce

till I got rigged out in other togs. Blow me if you haven't the cut of the sarvice!'

Neil began to get alarmed. If what the man said was true, he might find himself in an awkward fix. All of a sudden he noticed that one of the party opposite had disappeared.

'I'm much obliged to you,' said he. 'It would be difficult for me to explain matters at present, and one of those fellows has gone out since I came in.'

The little man swore beneath his breath.

'It's a trap, sir,' said he; 'I'll take my davy on it. They don't know you're a gent, but I seed it at once. Says I to myself——'

What his reflections had been Neil was never to learn, for at that moment there came a hurried sound of footsteps outside, and then a loud knocking at the door. The woman had vanished into the back-room. Neil sprang to his feet as the crimps ran to open to the King's man.

'Nabbed, by G——!' said the little seaman, as, headed by an officer, a crowd of pig-tailed Jacks in loose coats and wide flapping breeches poured into the tavern.

'A couple o' pretty birds!' said the lieutenant. 'You had best come along quietly, my lads.'

He was a man with grayish, sandy hair, a freckled face, blotched and discoloured, and a pair of ferrety eyes which looked like black beads in the lamplight.

'Missed stays this time, cap'n,' said Neil's friend coolly. 'I'm mate of the *Grampus*, what's alongside the jetty.'

'The deuce you are!' cried the other in a gruff voice. 'Where's your papers? Just so,' he went on, running his eye over the sheets. 'Get out and be hanged to you! Lug the big one along, boys, and hurry up.'

'Get out yourself,' said the mate of the *Grampus*; 'this here's a gent.'

There was a roar of laughter from the frigate's crew.

'Looks like one!' said the lieutenant. 'A damned deserter, that's what he is. The salt's in his ducks even yet. Blessed if he won't be the fly dog who played the dirty trick on the lugger! We were to look out for you, my man.'

'Sir,' said Neil, 'allow me to explain.'

'You'll have lots of time to explain on the way to Gib., my fine fellow. It'll keep your jaw-tackle in order, so stow your gab and fetch your bundle.'

'I tell you,' said Neil angrily, 'I am not a seaman.'

'We'll mighty soon make you one, then. Come along, if you don't want a cracked head; and no more of your lies.'

'No more of your impertinence, you mean,' cried Neil, forgetting the ludicrous figure he made in his short-sleeved jacket and shrunken nether garments; 'I'm a lawyer, an advocate.'

'Ay, ay; a sea lawyer,' laughed the officer. 'Where's your proofs? None to show, as usual; wonder you're not a mate, like all the rest o' them. No, no, my lad; your spree's over, so no nonsense.'

'I give you fair warning,' said Neil, 'that if one of your men so much as lays a finger on me I'll fell him. I've told you the truth.'

'And so have I when I say you board the *Rattler* this blessed night, for all your yarns. Seize him, men!'

But Neil did not wait. With a bound he was upon them. His clenched fist took the lieutenant under the angle of his jaw, drove his teeth half-way into his tongue, and sent him reeling against the wall. The men closed upon Neil with a rush, but he struck out right and left, and, aided by his height and their hampered movements, he cleared a way through them into the passage, while he heard the mate of the *Grampus* cheering vociferously at his exploit. That worthy, indeed, after giving vent to his feelings, found it advisable to clear out by the window, and so passes also out of our tale.

Neil's desperate bid for liberty might have ended successfully had not the man who had brought the pressgang on him remained outside. He, seeing how matters went, shut the outer door and hung on to it by the knocker, while before Neil could wrench it open he was overpowered from behind. The rest of that night he spent as a prisoner between decks in company with a dozen others, some drunk, some sober, who were to be forced against their wills to serve His Gracious Majesty on board the fine frigate *Rattler*, bound for the Mediterranean with sealed orders, a sick captain, and a first lieutenant who was a disgrace to the uniform he wore.

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It was a dead calm day, not even a ripple visible. The *Rattler* sat upon the water like a ship fixed in glass. Her long hull, her masts and shrouds and sails were all faithfully reproduced in the motionless depths which bosomed her keel and a dozen and odd feet of her copper-sheathed bottom. Her ensign drooped at half-mast, not a breath of air stirred her cloths, which hung in lags and lurks and wrinkles, those fantastic shapes with lights and shadows on them which canvas takes when at full spread but not wind-stirred. There was nothing in sight from the decks, not even a wandering seabird or a travelling porpoise heralding his passage in his own merry, blowing fashion. There was a peace and rest over all the ocean which seemed in harmony with the occasion; for a hammock lay upon a grating, and within the hammock lay Captain Caldecott, who had resigned his command under orders from a greater power than the Lords of the Admiralty. The crew stood in a double line on either side, bare-headed and uneasy. It was not merely that they had that aversion to a funeral at sea common to men of their class, but they had doubts as to the future. The flag and coarse sailcloth covered the body of one of that great number of loyal and

honest gentlemen who have served England on the ocean since the days when they donned armour and darted from bay and river-mouth in the beak-bowed galleys of King Alfred to give battle to Dane and Norseman—a grand breed of men who never failed their country in her need, firm yet kindly, bluff and hearty, but with thought for the sea-dogs who fought under them, and bled and died beside them—men without genius perhaps, with few talents and little culture, but sailors to the core and fighters to the backbone, who could lead and were followed with that devotion which made the name of Britain terrible upon the high seas. Now and then a man more brilliant than his fellows, more daring or more cunning, rose from their ranks, and such a one was worshipped and adored, and handed down his name to history; but there is no record of many a plain, God-fearing, French-hating commander who trod his quarterdeck in days of yore till he stained it with his blood, died beneath it in his cabin, or left it, maimed and wounded, in his prime, or at a ripe old age, having served long and faithfully.

Captain Caldecott had been one of them, and his crew knew it, and knew there was none like him to take his place.

Lieutenant Gasket, who had now assumed command, belonged to another class, happily not common, who have left a blot upon the red ensign of St. George.

In the days when the navy had its hands full, when every powder-monkey heard the hum of shot and saw the splinters fly, death was busy on battleship and frigate, and promotion rapid. It was like a skittle-ball, which sweeps down its men at one fell swoop, leaving great gaps, and these gaps had to be filled.

Now and then the wrong men filled them, and there was the devil to pay, and a record of mutiny and marooning, and the hoisting of the black flag to

fill folks with horror, and raise a doubt as to the manning of our wooden walls.

Lieutenant Gasket was a product of his times. As a boy he had been given the chance of a prison or a three-decker, and had decided to serve his King. He had served every able-bodied man and boy on the ship as well, and had lived to remember it. Cuffed, and kicked, and starved till the iron had entered his soul, he had become a seaman, and learned his work well. He was clever in a shallow way, quick to grasp his opportunities, and civil to those above him.

Thanks to these traits in his character, he had risen to be a petty officer, hated and feared, and full of a zeal for those slight tyrannies which gall the spirit and leave a rankle behind them. But he got the name of being a smart officer, and made the most of it, willing to do any dirty work, and finding out exactly how far he might go in imitation of those who had made his life a burden to him when he had first encountered a rope's end. He had sprung suddenly to his late post, and stayed there, growing gray and lean and sour, increasing his faculty of getting work out of his men and himself disliked, and the best officer in the navy to head a press-gang or deal with a defaulter. Short-and-Sharp was his method, and his nickname, and the latter was rarely mentioned in the midshipmen's mess or the 'tween decks forrard without a garnishing of oaths.

No wonder the crew of the *Rattler* looked glum and sorrowful as, the hurried reading of the burial service ended, the boatswain's whistle piped long and melancholy, the flag was whipped aside, and the hammock, with its twenty-four pound shot, flashed from the side and cleft the surface of the Bay of Biscay.

John Gasket held supreme power at last, and he quickly showed it. He counted it fortunate that he

had something in hand to occupy the men while the tiresome calm lasted. The spectacle he was about to furnish would, he fancied, establish him securely in his new position, efface lingering memories of Captain Caldecott, and be on the whole popular. He had a wonderful knowledge of what passed in the forecastle, for he believed in spies and paid them well, and so he was aware that Neil Darroch was no favourite. He had an old score to pay off in that direction, and an excellent charge of insubordination to justify his procedure, and so, before the men dispersed, the whistle piped again, this time thrice merrily, and every man without rating aboard understood that his skin would be in danger from that time forward did he happen to fall foul of Captain Short-and-Sharp.

Neil Darroch had suffered a thousand miseries since the night he had been bundled, bound and gagged, on board the frigate. He had little of the philosopher about him by this time, and could not reconcile himself to his altered surroundings. He made strenuous efforts to explain matters, but the Captain was ill, and Lieutenant Gasket, furious at the blow he had received, and mad with the pain in his tongue, had turned a deaf ear to all his entreaties, while the smugglers had been taken by a seventy-four, also in need of men, and Neil had no witnesses.

'The ship's sailed, and you're in her,' was his sole answer, accompanied by a look which meant, 'I'm in her also, so have a care.'

Had Neil been wise he would have bowed to the inevitable, and made the best of matters; but who can blame him for acting otherwise? The lieutenant at first had no doubts but that Neil was lying, and did not pay special attention to him. When he did he found reasons of his own for disliking him.

Years before, when he was a petty officer, he had been concerned in the cutting out of a West India-

man. In one of the cabins he had come upon a young French girl of singular beauty, whom he handled roughly, stripping her of the few rings and trinkets she wore, and threatening to gag her if she made an outcry.

In the midst of his gentlemanly occupation he had been surprised by another petty officer named Darroch, a man who had risen rapidly from before the mast and whom John Gasket hated with the hatred begotten of jealousy and thwarted hopes. Darroch had forced him to relinquish his prey and threatened him with exposure, and he had vowed to be quits with the 'canting Scotchman.' But his laudable resolve was never fulfilled. They drifted apart and did not meet again. When therefore Lieutenant Gasket heard the name of one of the pressed men, a name far from common, he had much ado to conceal his excitement. On more careful scrutiny than had at first been possible he traced a resemblance between his latest recruit and the man whose memory he hated. But he gave no one an inkling of what passed in his mind. He was too cunning to show personal spite, and though his officers came to wonder at the severity of the punishment he meted out to the unfortunate Neil, they never suspected that he was actuated by any other motive than a desire to uphold discipline, coupled with a natural anger at the assault made upon him. He did not even make certain he was on the right track. It was enough for John Gasket that he was possibly, nay, probably, paying off old scores.

Neil had behaved foolishly. The crew quickly sized him up and at first were inclined to commiserate him, but he would have none of their pity; always a solitary man, he was bewildered by the company in which he found himself.

He had never had dealings with the lower orders and did not understand them. His clients had belonged to that law-crazy class who at one time

haunted the precincts of the Parliament House in Edinburgh, and spent their time and money in vain litigation about the position of a midden-heap, or the price of a horse. He had known how to deal with them in the capacity of law adviser, but he had little real knowledge of men.

Thus he turned the cold shoulder to their friendly approaches, and they put him down as a 'swab' and a 'darned prig,' and made things unpleasant for him.

At first he raved and stormed, vowing vengeance in a way which made him look ridiculous when one considered how impotent he was. After all, his lot was no worse than that of many who in those days were torn from the bosoms of their families, sometimes after having been absent for many a year. The only wonder is that Britain was so well served by her pressed men. But the sailor is tough. He turns his quid and there is an end of his murmurings. He is perhaps the most stoical of men.

Things went from bad to worse with Neil. The *Rattler* encountered heavy weather, and he wished more than once that he were dead. Finally he sunk into a state of sullen obstinacy. He refused to do a stroke of work, and was promptly clapped into irons and kept in solitary confinement. This, far from breaking his spirit, encouraged him in his resolve to defy John Gasket.

He heard that he had the sympathy of some of the officers, and he hoped they would intercede for him, but he hoped in vain.

As a matter of fact, his chief regret was that he had been balked of his scheme of revenge. His grandfather's blood was coming uppermost in him. Strange to say, his grandfather's fate awaited him, for the boatswain's signal had meant a flogging, one of the many brutal punishments supposed to be necessary for licking the obdurate man-of-war's man into shape.

A couple of marines brought Neil on deck. He found the crew drawn up on three sides of a square about a carronade beside which stood a brawny fellow fingering the leaden-tipped thongs of a cat-o'-nine-tails.

Lieutenant Gasket cleared his throat.

'You know me, my lads,' he said. 'I'm of the old school, and when any man don't obey my orders I give him a chance, a fair chance. If that fails he's flogged. The prisoner has had his chance, but I am willing to go no further this time if he will stow his nonsense and do as he is told. Now, my man, there's the cat and here am I. Make your choice.'

'I protest,' began Neil.

'Make your choice!' roared Gasket.

'I appeal to these gentlemen,' cried Neil desperately, nodding towards the officers, who were at no pains to conceal their disgust.

'You appeal, do you?' sneered the lieutenant, who had mastered his temper. 'You will find there's no appeal from my finding, Mr. Sea Lawyer. Three dozen, and well laid on,' he added, turning to the man with the cat, who was one of his creatures, and so had been chosen for the office.

'Mark me,' said Neil quietly, seeing his case was hopeless, 'you shall rue this some day; and here and now I say in your teeth that you are a villain, sir, and a liar, and I am prepared to back my words.'

'And I am prepared to score your back,' said Gasket, who was white with suppressed passion. 'This is rank mutiny, ship's books or no ship's books. Trice him up!'

He was obeyed, and Neil, stripped and spread-eagled across the cannon's breech, suffered his punishment to the full, took it without a sound, his eyes starting from his head with pain, and his anger almost stifling him. The tails curled about his ribs and left their trace in blood, a trace of shame which

was indelible. The mere smarting of his torn skin was as nothing; but that he, a gentleman of an old Scottish family, should bear such an indignity before a crowd of English seamen, at the orders of an ill-bred upstart of low birth, touched him to the quick. He did not struggle, but there was a harsh sob in his throat as they cast off the lashings. It had not been a specially heavy sentence—six dozen strokes, ay, and far more, was not uncommon in those rough times—but it would have left many a strong man limp and broken. For a moment Neil lay panting against the metal, spent and in an agony of shame, then, braced by his consuming wrath, he swung quickly round, and springing at the lieutenant, felled him at one blow.

Someone cheered, a ship's boy in all probability, for the sound was shrill and high-pitched, but no one stirred as Gasket got upon his feet and the two men faced each other.

'This should mean a hanging,' said the lieutenant soberly; 'but another three dozen will teach you not to strike your superior officer, and will be a lesson to all here. There's no vice about me, but we must and shall have discipline. Trice him up!'

'Shame!' cried a voice as Neil was seized again.

'Mr. Calthrop, did you notice who spoke?' asked Gasket of the second in command.

'I did not,' said that officer untruthfully; 'but do you not think the man has had enough for the present? He looks as though he would faint.'

Indeed, Neil presented a pitiable spectacle, with the long weals and blood-gouts striping and dotting his white skin, his face pale and drawn, his eyes wild, his nostrils distended, and his mouth tightly shut, as if to prevent some bitter cry bursting forth, some sign of weakness or distress.

'You think so, do you, Mr. Calthrop? Well, I happen to know a good old-fashioned remedy for that. There's time for it before the breeze reaches

us; and mark me, men, I am master here, let there be no mistake as to that. Get a tackle on the main yard-arm, and quick about it. This fellow has to learn the ship, and he'll begin with the keel.'

CHAPTER III.

YARD-ARM TO YARD-ARM.

IT is said that the Dutch invented the science of keel-hauling, but it would be difficult to say where Captain Gasket got the idea, as this mode of torture had long been obsolete. Indeed, half its charm vanished when barnacles refused to adhere to copper sheathing, and so, perhaps, it passed into disuse. John Gasket was wise in his generation. Had he insisted on again flogging Neil, he might have raised an ugly storm against himself; but this, to them, novel form of punishment appealed to the crew. Few, if any of them, had seen it in operation, but most were aware that in a large ship it was no very dreadful ordeal, nothing to riding the whole length of the barnacle-spotted keel of a small vessel.

Thus they regarded it as a mitigation of the sentence and as an interesting spectacle at another's expense.

Mr. Calthrop did not protest further, so far as words went. He merely quitted the deck, followed by his brother officers, with the exception of a couple of midshipmen, whose boyish fancies constrained them to remain, though inwardly they were damning their new captain with the utmost vigour and sincerity.

The calm had come to an end, and had been superseded by an easy swell, the forerunner of a westerly breeze, which was driving up a cloud-bank on the horizon, but was yet far from the ship.

The *Rattler* rolled a little, and her yards dipped

first to one side then to another, but there was no difficulty in rigging a running rope, a bight of which had first of all been dropped over the stern and dragged along till it rested amidships. Neil Darroch was quickly made fast to it. He did not resist, he said not a word as he was run up to the end of the yard-arm, and hung dangling like a man hanged.

Presently the boatswain piped again, and he slipped through the air and entered the water feet first. With the instinct of self-preservation he filled his lungs ere he sank, and then was dragged swiftly downwards. The salt nipped his raw and reddened back and momentarily quickened his senses, which had for a time been blunted by what he had passed through. But he afterwards had little recollection of what he felt—of the scraping against the frigate's sheathing and against her broad keel, of the bursting sensation in his chest, relieved as he got rid of the air he had taken in, and then of the terrible oppression, the struggle for breath, the agony for respiration, for the oxygen which is life to a man. He was unconscious as he left the sea and was hoisted to the other extremity of the yard.

The only wonder was that he yet lived, but, as the *Rattler* rounded to the breeze and sent the spray flying from her forefoot and left a wake behind her stern-post and rudder, Neil Darroch began to come to himself in the cockpit, under the influence of hot brandy, rubbing, and the treatment of the good-natured Irish surgeon, who—poor bibulous soul!—was shedding tears of mingled grief and drink over the pitiable condition of his latest patient.

The *Rattler* fell in with steady winds and dashed bravely on her way. In those days there was no prettier sight at sea than a first-class frigate in a breeze. What with her bowsprit ending in a dainty point, the rakish set of her dolphin-striker, the clean outline of her cutwater, her graceful hull lined by her row of ports, from which her cannon grinned defiance,

her stern windows glancing in the sea light, her snowy decks and sparkling brass-work, her lofty masts tapering to shapely wands and clad with snowy cloths from her bulging mainsails to her taut top-gallants, her flaunting ensign, and the delicate tracery of her standing and running rigging, she was the embodiment of sauciness and speed. She might not have the stately majesty of the huge line-of-battle ship, whose vast swelling bows, tiers of guns, towering sides and clouds of canvas filled the beholder with a sense of power and grandeur, but for all that she was the favourite. Gallant craft they were, and very different from the long, black, steel-clad, smoke-belching cruisers which have ousted them from their ocean hunting-grounds, and drive nose-deep into a sea and against the teeth of gales which would have sent the old wooden walls scudding before them under bare poles and with hatches battened down.

Outwardly, the *Rattler* was as smart a frigate as any in commission, inwardly she was a floating hell. Her lieutenant commandant was a dyspeptic and had the temper bred of indigestion in addition to his natural vindictiveness and acquired sourness of disposition. His sudden access to power seemed to have turned his head. His usual caution deserted him in large measure. He found fault with trifles, he quarrelled with his officers, he docked the men of their tot of grog, he gave them no peace, putting them through cutlass drill, fire drill, small-arms exercise, and a dozen other wearying performances till life was a burden to them. He was possesssed of an overweening conceit, and was determined to make a name for himself as a frigate captain. He certainly very quickly made a name for himself on board, but not of the kind he hankered after, though such was his nature that he found some pleasure in being known as a harsh martinet. He fondly dreamed of an admiral's pennant and a jewelled sword, but came

nearer an ounce of lead in his lean carcass, placed there by his own crew.

English seamen stand much. There is a dogged, obedient spirit in them which rarely changes to that of resistance. They are probably more amenable to discipline than any other race or profession. There has always been a very small proportion of Scots in the navy, though more than their fair share in the Merchant Service. The reason is simple. The Scotchman, as an English naval captain once remarked, inelegantly but aptly, 'is too beastly independent.'

But there comes a time when the English tar gets his back up. He will stand any amount of discipline, but he will not long brook oppression. When this mood comes upon him, he is not to be trifled with. Woe betide the commander who goads him revolt! Once let a crew make up their minds to to hate an officer or to mutiny, they rarely alter their feelings or draw back, provided they have a leader. They are like sheep in some ways, and there are no more obstinate animals than those woolly quadrupeds.

Things went smoothly enough for a week after Neil's punishment, though there was grumbling and discontent at Gasket's fads and methods; but by the time Neil was on his feet and ready for revenge he found a suitable material to his hand. There is nothing more wearying and exasperating than a wet ship, and the *Rattler* was wet enough to swim in. Off Finisterre she met a capful of wind and a jabble, which set her dipping bows under and flooded her scuppers. She dipped and dripped and would not run easily, trim her as they might. The snoring breeze became a stiff sou'wester, and the sou'wester a three days' gale. It was a case of lying-to, close-reefed and battened down, a lurching rush and an easy slide, up and down, down and up, with now and then a clean sweep of tons of salt sea from the

cat-heads to the poop-stairs. The wind shrilled in twanging notes through the shrouds, and sang its storm-song amongst the yards and round the tops. The rain showers, coming and going as the vapour masses drifted overhead, hissed and spluttered, and the great drops danced and hopped upon the soaking planks. It was cold and cheerless, like an autumn day on the German Ocean, rather than a day in the latitude of sunny Spain.

There was no danger, no deadly lee shore, no need for anchors out and a firm holding; there was plenty of sea-room, and nothing to do but wait.

It was weary work, and the men had time to count the number of floggings which had taken place since Gasket took over command.

'Mind ye,' said one, 'I'm not sayin' he ain't a sailor—he knows the ropes, none better—but of all the blamed ramrods and lanterned-jawed skippers! A nagger he is, and no mistake—nag to-day, nag to-morrow, and on Friday it's vinegar and the cat. Bile me alive if I ever seed such a termigint!'

'Bedad, and that's thrue!' growled a son of Erin. "Be aisy, Cap'n dear," says I, seein' him all av a sweat; and the dirthy baste heard me in a twinklin', and put me on senthry duty, like a lobster. He's the sowl av a tom-cat and the snort av a grampus, bad luck to his bones!'

'Ay, ay,' chimed in another. 'There's Mr. Bowling, a nice bit o' a lad as don't mind ye havin' a whiff in a dog-watch.'

'A broth av a boy,' quoth the Irishman.

'And I'm blowed if this 'ere Gasket don't go and masthead him from three bells till sundown in this blessed smother all for skylarkin' with the cat in the gun-room. The kid was fair froze and doing his best not to blubber when he came down. A black shame I call it.'

'And yet you stand it,' said a voice.

Neil Darroch had been reluctantly discharged from

the sick-bay by the surgeon, and had entered unobserved.

'Sorra a bit,' replied the Irishman; 'there's no standing in this divil av a bucket. It's belay mate, and the soup on the outside av yer stomach instid av ballastin' ye.'

The others laughed, and Neil saw that he had no chance just then of making headway with them, But he altered his conduct. He had got his sea-legs by this time, and he turned out with the rest, and ran aloft when ordered. He took care not to appear too willing, but his behaviour was such as to confirm Gasket in the efficacy of his treatment.

'Look there, sir,' he said to Mr. Calthrop; 'that's what comes of having served before the mast. You know your men and how to handle them. A clever scamp, that Darroch. I half believed his yarn, and look at him, sir: lays out upon the yards like a monkey, and knows more than you'd think. "A lawyer," says he. "Sea lawyer," says I, "and be —— to you!" It's a pity you hadn't my training, sir.'

To all of which Lieutenant Calthrop answered nothing, but bowed in a way his senior officer secretly envied, and even practised before his glass as likely to prove useful when he ruled a three-decker. In the old days Neil would never have resorted to the methods he employed for carrying out his plan of revenge against Gasket. He would have scorned to sow discontent, to whisper here, to drop a word there, to be sarcastic before men who could appreciate his biting tongue, to speak bluntly before those who could make nothing of a hidden meaning. It would have gone against his grain to have to watch for Gasket's spies, to have to choose his opportunities, to have to flatter and cajole. At times his soul revolted from the meanness of the thing, but ever there would come the thought of those shameful scars to goad him to further efforts. Just then he

was a little queer in the head. There was a strain of wildness in the family of Darroch, and he had not been the same man since the injury to his brain.

He had brooded over his wrongs till they filled the whole field of his vision and haunted him like a nightmare. In his dreams he would see the weals upon his back like bloody fingers pointing out the path he was to tread. Had it been possible he would have fought Gasket fairly man to man; but it was not, and so he had recourse to the only feasible method, regardless of what might happen, provided only he could gloat over the lieutenant's fall.

There was something repulsive in this absorbing passion, and he knew it. At times it came home to him with startling force, and he would wonder at himself, but again the thought of the shame to which he had been put stirred him to his heart-strings. A hot pride possessed him, and he moved amongst the men like an evil spirit—like the enemy who in the night sowed tares.

He was fiendishly clever in his way. It had been his business to refute arguments, to detect flaws in specious statements, to build up a good case upon slender grounds. And here he had plenty to go upon, men easily influenced, and none too logical. He was never precise in his utterances; he merely hinted, talked vaguely, and let rumour and idleness do the rest, and so gradually there came to be a decided opinion that it would be well for all hands if Captain Gasket were removed and Mr. Calthrop set in his place. There was no idea of a general mutiny; some were in favour of a round-robin addressed to the officer, and pointing out that Mr. Gasket had not been appointed captain, that his promotion had not been confirmed, and that the men were dissatisfied with the treatment they received from him. Others favoured a marooning, the officers being surprised and kept locked up till 'Short-and-Sharp'

had been sent adrift. The big Irishman who had come in for the cat considered that there was nothing 'loike shovin' the dirthy blaggyard overboard av a dark night if it was rough,' and expressed his willingness to do the deed, which, being reported by some eavesdropper, resulted in the master-at-arms and bread-and-water diet for poor Mike, and a threat of another keel-hauling, the last having proved so satisfactory.

The *Rattler* should have touched at Gibraltar, but for reasons of his own Lieutenant Gasket considered it better to carry on, explaining that he bore despatches for the Mediterranean fleet, and had already lost nearly a week as the result of calms and rough weather. In his inmost soul John Gasket was thirsting to distinguish himself. A successful action would almost certainly secure to him the post he held. There had never been any doubt as to his courage. A bully, some say, cannot be brave. He may not possess that self-sacrificing heroism which is the finest, as it is the rarest, form of courage; but there can be no doubt that bullies—that stamp of them, at least, who are cruel from the belief that such cruelty is necessary—may be possessed of no little valour. History has proved it. The martinet is indeed rarely a coward.

It is very different with the wretch who loves to inflict pain, who takes a pleasure in making men's lives a burden. Such villains are for the most part poltroons; but John Gasket was not one of these. He had been bred in a rough school, and believed in its teaching. A disordered stomach and a long, disappointing career had irritated and embittered him; he was not a gentleman by birth, he was narrow-minded, and so he was brutal in a cold, calculating way. But he had a fiery ambition stowed away somewhere out of sight, and half his preparations, which had wearied and angered the crew, had been to make sure of victory in the event of an

engagement. He was willing to attack anything from a corvette to a hundred-gun ship, for he feared his chance might pass. There had been rumours of peace before the *Rattler* left England. It had been the general opinion that at last the power which had convulsed the whole of Europe was nearly spent, the master-spirit well-nigh broken. The allies had conquered on every hand, and were bent on crushing Napoleon. They had united in a great effort to defeat and humble him, and none on board the frigate knew how it had ended.

Gasket perhaps feared to learn that hostilities had ceased. It may have been, as Midshipman Bowling averred, that his talk about despatches was 'all my eye.' Anyhow the *Rattler* passed through the straits on a westerly wind and hauled to the north, heading for the Gulf of Lyons. A French 60-gun ship, from the West Indies, which had also slipped past the fortress rock and was bound for Marseilles, pointed her bowsprit in the same direction, and as the frigate was under easy sail and the Frenchman in a mortal hurry, and a fast traveller besides, it befell one fine morning that the look-out in the *Rattler's* fore-top espied the royals of a tall ship to the south and hailed the quarterdeck to that effect. Lieutenant Gasket was below, but hurried up at the news, and went aloft, so eager was he to make out the nationality of the stranger. He had not spent all his life at sea for nothing, and by the time her top-gallants showed he was half convinced she would display the tricolour. And so it proved. She was a large vessel with yellow sides, and came up rapidly, sailing two feet to the frigate's one.

'We'll trick her, Mr. Calthrop,' said Gasket. 'Get a French flag at the gaff and beat to quarters.'

The drums rattled out their summons, the magazine was opened, and shot and powder served. The *Rattler* held easily upon her way.

'Now, lads,' said Gasket to the men, who were

mustered aft, 'no cheering, but yonder comes a Frenchman, who has to change his colours before night.'

The men's faces bore witness to their feelings. In the excitement of a coming fight the greater number forget their animosity to the lean, ugly officer, who in his nervous tension kept buttoning and unbuttoning his long blue coat, and clearing his throat and spitting over the side. His behaviour was not dignified, but he showed no trace of fear.

'I haven't flogged the rogues for nothing,' he remarked to Calthrop as he noticed the smart way the men went to their posts. 'I only hope the Mounseers won't turn tail.'

'The French,' replied the lieutenant with an emphasis on the word, 'rarely do so, sir, till they have tried conclusions.'

'Ay, ay,' said Gasket, 'but we'll conclude them, though, by the Lord! she carries heavy metal. I've seen that hull before. They call her the *Toolong;* maybe you've heard tell of her?'

'Not by that name, sir,' said Calthrop with the suspicion of a smile.

He was a quiet, pale-faced little man, whose ancestors had served afloat for generations, and he was amused and a trifle annoyed at Gasket's nervousness when in command. He put it down to lack of breeding, for he had his own ideas as to an officer's proper behaviour, and hated fuss and display of any kind. His commander did not perceive the drift of his remark, but continued his preparations till it was clear the enemy, whatever their suspicions, had no intention of altering their course.

Meanwhile a great struggle was going on in Neil Darroch's mind. As soon as he heard there was a likelihood of an engagement he had devised a plan before which his other plot sank into insignificance. He remembered that he had the same blood in him

as had those who manned the ship to windward. He had no love for England. On the contrary, the history of his family, his own experiences, the point of view from which he had been accustomed to regard his country's past, caused him to dislike, indeed almost to hate, the dominant partner. At the same time the idea which had come into his head disturbed him mightily. Man is the creature of his environment, and part of Neil's life had done something to efface his early memories and prejudices. He had found the Scottish capital loyal, Whiggish, and ultra-British. A few of the old-time Jacobites remained, and many yet clinked glasses to a famous toast, and wore a white cockade upon occasion, but there had been none of that fierce, consuming passion which had possessed old Ian Darroch. Jacobitism was dead. It had degenerated into something like old lace—something rare, out-of-date and ornamental, and was considered very becoming to a vapouring, hoary-headed gentleman in knee-breeches and ruffles, or an elderly dame with a turban and hooped petticoats. Neil had recognised this at first with sorrow and surprise, then with equanimity, though he never wavered in his beliefs. He had cheered with the crowd at the news of a victory, he had approved of bonfires and volunteers, but naturally enough he had never seriously considered the allegiance he professed to the British crown. Indeed, being a great reader, he had conceived an admiration for his mother's country, for her literature, her art, her fascinating history, her prowess on the field. Buonaparte's marvellous deeds had thrilled him as they thrilled many who had no kinship with France. He had never found reason to be ashamed of his Gallic blood. Was it not a tie between him and the woman he had loved and lost, thanks to a villain who was wholly English in breeding if not in birth? What did he owe to England? An impoverished

home, a back marked like a malefactor's, punishment and insult for no adequate reason. Why should he have to fight her battles, and perhaps die in her cause? he asked himself. He put out of sight the fact that it was a British, not an English craft, whose decks he paced. This was not surprising, for the former word was not used on board. There was not a single Scot in the frigate's company. He had no sympathy with any of the crew or officers. Some, he knew, were good fellows; but, as he said to himself, there were just as worthy men serving under the tricolour—men to whom he was bound by closer ties, who had never wronged him, who would welcome him amongst them, and recognise his position. Why should he not revolt? A whole nation had declared its independence for much less than he had suffered. He recalled tales of the famous Paul Jones, son of a Kirkcudbright gardener, who had made his name a terror along the British coast, and had risen to distinction. He remembered the long roll of Scottish men of family—his ancestor among them—who had fought with honour for the old royal flag of France. He was aware that at least one of Napoleon's marshals was a countryman of his own. There could be no disgrace, he said to himself, in throwing in his lot with the enemies of John Gasket.

Besides, if his scheme succeeded, he would have turned the tables with a vengeance. He knew the fierce, proud spirit with which England's sons in those days ruled the seas. Could he but in some measure tame it, could he but make Gasket's name a by-word in every seaport town, could he but land him, a broken, sick-hearted man, in a French prison, the first part of his revenge would be complete. His conscience was free; he had signed no papers; he had been captured, and was in reality a prisoner himself. A mixture of feelings, it will be seen, urged him on, and who shall say which weighed the most

with him when he cried exultingly, 'I'll do it, so help me God!'

His plan was no less than the resolve to put the *Rattler* at the mercy of her antagonist. His notion was to gain access to the magazine, and threaten to blow the frigate to pieces if she did not instantly surrender. This daring design was, he found, frustrated by the presence of a guard of marines, who, he fancied, looked upon him with suspicion. He slunk back as he noticed them, and as he came out of the narrow passage a gruff voice hailed him:

'Now then, you there, no skulking!' shouted the captain of the lower deck. 'Away with you aft, you shore-going swab! Here, Billy, take him to your gun and see he does his duty.'

The powder-monkey grinned; but he was friendly enough with Neil, who followed him, trying to shake off a feeling of shame which, argue as he might, possessed him.

By a curious chance he found the gun's crew composed largely of men with whom he had influence. Some of them had been pressed like himself, others were the sweepings of gaols and crimp-houses, few of them trained seamen, and he knew that one and all hated Gasket as much as he did. They looked sullen, and were clearly not fired by any enthusiasm. Neil's ready brain began to scheme anew, to imagine afresh, as soon as he saw them.

Meanwhile, the Frenchman had come up in gallant style, threshing and plunging on the silver-laced swell, her amber, black-dotted sides showing up against the rich blue of the sea, that glorious sapphire hue for which the Mediterranean is famed. A cluster of red-capped men thronged her bows, her guns were run out, her nettings rigged, and the roll of a drum came over the waters as she beat to quarters.

Her captain was no greenhorn, and had his doubts

of the trim black frigate with the striped flag at her gaff. As soon as Gasket saw that the enemy had no desire to avoid a contest if it was forthcoming, he threw deception to the winds. Down came the tricolour, and up went a Jack in its place, and the red cross to the masthead.

As the bunting fluttered out, a shout came from the Frenchman's decks and a cheer from the frigate, which crowded sail, and, veering, stood across the Frenchman's bows, resolved to engage her to leeward lest she should change her mind and attempt to escape.

As she did so, the Frenchman opened fire with her fore-deck guns, long eights and heavy carronades. Flash and boom, flash and boom, out thundered her cannonade, and the battle smoke drifted in sulphurous clouds from her sides; then, to foil her adversary, she filled, wore, and came to on the opposite tack, and again half a broadside hurtled its round-shot at the *Rattler*. The frigate's sails showed seams and rents and holes, many a rope's end dangled loose aloft, a spar or two came rattling down upon her planking. Again she manœuvred, and again was baffled and received the fire of the great yellow ship.

'Blow them!' yelled Gasket; 'they're no fools. Mr. Calthrop, run us to close quarters, sir, and see she don't rake us.'

It was a bold measure to sail right at the enemy to windward, but the frigate bore down on her adversary, grim and silent, while the Frenchman's ports spouted flame, and white water-jets sprang upwards from the swells on which the *Rattler* rode, and her hull was streaked where the shot met it and glanced off.

'Ready, men!' roared Gasket, his face hot with excitement, his whole thoughts centred on the moment.

It looked as if the frigate would strike her foe amidships, but suddenly she swung round within

pistol-shot, till her whole broadside was brought to bear, and then in one ear-splitting discharge her eighteen cannon belched forth their iron hail, and swept the *Toulon's* decks.

'Give it her again, my lads!' shouted Calthrop, and his middies echoed his order.

Round, grape, and musketry did their fell work, and made a shambles of both craft, but the *Rattler* suffered more than her opponent, whose heavier broadside at such close range did deadly execution.

'Too hot to last, sir,' said Calthrop, as a man beside him was cut almost in half. 'We're a wreck aloft, and she'll forge ahead and cross our bows.'

'Will she?' cried Gasket, with an oath. 'Then we'll give them the cutlass, sir, and finish it quick. Hard a-port,' he bellowed through his trumpet, 'and prepare to board! Out grapplings, and stand by to repel boarders! Send Mr. Harper forrard, and see to the small arms,' he added. 'Where's the wind? Curse it! she's slow, sir—she's slow.'

But if slow, she was sure. Her bow pointed towards the *Toulon*, the strip of sea between them lessened. Steered to a nicety, she ran along the Frenchman's side, with hand grenades and musket-balls raining down upon her, and found herself at last where the British tar loved to place his ship, yard-arm to yard-arm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXILE

NOW began a battle more fierce and terrible yet like a hundred others the seas had witnessed in the course of the long war waged by the greatest maritime nations of the world.

Lashed together, gripped by the grappling-irons, rising and falling on the swell, drifting with the breeze, the two vessels poured a deadly fire into each

other. Their sides were scorched with flame, their paint burst into blisters and cracked and peeled; a dense canopy of smoke enveloped them, and from its midst rose their masts, their tattered sails, their hanging cordage. Amongst it their crews fought like fiends, sponging and ramming, loading and running out, cheering and sweating.

In those days there was no particular uniform for the British seaman. Some fought in their glazed billycock hats, some bareheaded, many had handkerchiefs bound about their brows. Some were naked to the hips, others were clad in variously coloured shirts open at the breast and rolled up to the elbows. The officers and the marines alone were distinguished. There were some score of the latter on board the *Rattler*, and they stood in a red line upon the main deck pouring in volleys or picking off men in the *Toulon's* tops, as cool as if on parade.

The din was deafening: the roar of the great guns, the crackle of musketry, the crashing thunder of a whole broadside, mingled with the tearing, rending sound of splintering wood, the rattle of falling blocks and spars, the flapping of sails loose in the bolt ropes. Hoarse orders were bawled from quarterdeck to forecastle, shot hummed or shrieked overhead, a babel of shouts and cries rang out across the waters.

Twice the French crew essayed to board, leaping downwards in swarms upon the *Rattler's* deck—swarms of swarthy, agile seamen, most of them bearded to the eyes, and all tanned by a tropic sun.

Half of them never returned the way they came, so fiercely were they opposed. Man grappled with man, steel clashed on steel, and pistols flashed in the pan a couple of yards from their targets.

There was charging and counter-charging, and flank attacks, till the frigate was cleared at a heavy cost, and yet all the time a dozen cannon continued

to belch their missiles, though not a few were too hot for handling.

The *Toulon* was firing red-hot shot from some of her guns forward, and the *Rattler's* crew were busy slinging water on the flames which sprang up greedily in the track of the glowing balls. A cock on the French ship, liberated from a shattered poultry coop, crowed defiance, till a musket-ball carried away his head and gaping beak.

Great splinter-fringed gaps showed in the masts, more than one of which quivered ominously as their sails now and then bulged out before a waft of the breeze which the heavy cannonade had not entirely quelled. The planking of both craft, lately as trim and white as holystone could make it, was now blackened with powder smoke, and stained with terrible crimson splotches, which turned rapidly to dark, maroon-coloured crusts.

Coils of rope, empty buckets, bits of spars, fragments of clothing, loose shot, cutlasses, boarding pikes, discarded pistols, boat-stretchers, shattered boat timbers and other débris littered the decks. Men's bodies lay around the gun breeches limp or stiffening, straight or curved. The wounded were being borne to the cockpit, where, in the low-roofed, ill-lighted space, they were ranged against the bulkheads, each to wait his turn, or to die before that turn came. The place reeked of hot tar and vinegar, and the piteous moans and cries of agony spoke to the horror and disgrace of such a contest. And yet its glory and romance blotted out such scenes as these, and few thought of war's misery and hideous aspect. Perhaps it was as well in those days, for one nation at least was fighting for existence. Neil Darroch all this time had stood by the gun-carriage, lever in hand, and done what was required of him. His comrades fell fast, and the men, untrained to the work, had turned sick at the sights they saw. Some who had been dragged on board like Neil were soon

mere mangled heaps, the victims of as vile a tyranny as was ever justified by a stern necessity. The others looked at them, and though they fought doggedly, Neil could see that they felt themselves sacrificed, that they were bitter against the men who had forced them to risk their lives. It was the same at the next two ports, for by a curious coincidence the most discontented men on board seemed to be gathered aft. Yet they were not allowed to slacken in their efforts.

The gunners, who were old sea-dogs, were fighting heart and soul. It was their business to win their country's battles without question, and they trained their cannon and cried cheerily to their crews, who after a time entered into 'the fun of the thing,' as Mr. Bowling called it. Neil alone did not grow excited. He kept strangely calm, listening to the din till he was deaf as a post, watching the Frenchmen at the port opposite, who were as active as cats and served their eight-pounder as if it had been a toy. Suddenly the captain of Neil's gun staggered, even as he held the lanyard, and with a little cry of wonder fell flat upon his back, shot through the chest. The men looked at each other in dismay. None but novices were left. Almost at the same moment Neil saw the Frenchmen rush from their cannon. It was now the turn of the Rattlers, who were boarding the *Toulon*, led by Lieutenant Calthrop.

'This is Gasket's work,' said Neil, looking about him.

The men did not answer; the full meaning of what he said came home to them, but they were afraid.

'Look here!' he cried. 'Are we to be flogged and starved and shot like dogs, to please him, and help him to win promotion? I'm going aboard that Frenchman, lads, and you can come if you like. I'll be quits with him before the day's done; we're free men, not galley-slaves.'

'That's so!' shouted a sullen, heavy-featured rogue,

who had picked oakum in his day. 'Lead on, and——' he ended with a string of foul oaths.

'Fetch a plank, then,' said Neil, now full of his project and with all his doubts gone. There were only half a dozen to follow him, but he knew the effect their presence on the enemy's side would have.

They quickly ran a plank from port to port, and, headed by Neil, crossed one after another to the *Toulon's* under deck, which they reached unopposed.

'Now,' said Neil, 'follow me. I can speak to them, so all will be well.'

The men grinned. Neil could not help feeling ashamed of these traitorous Englishmen, but they served his purpose. He could not regard himself in the same light; he had quieted his conscience most effectually. He made them put on the caps of the dead Frenchmen they found, and mounting the companion stairs, came out upon the main-deck, where a fierce fight was raging. The Rattlers had boarded forward, and driven the *Toulon's* crew before them, but the latter had been reinforced from below, and were now making an effectual stand, slashing and firing, and shouting to encourage one another.

The moment was critical. Neil and his body of turncoats were in the rear of the Frenchmen. He saw at once how matters stood, and ran forward shouting out:

'Voilà vos amis! Vive la France, à bas les Anglais!'

But he ran forward alone. His men had also recognised the situation, and it proved too much for them. They could see their shipmates closely pressed, and the blood in them was stronger than their thirst for vengeance on a flogging captain.

'Bile me,' cried one of them, 'if I help the Parlez-voos!'

They stood irresolute, and then there arose a great cheer from below, and up came tumbling the crews of the next two guns, who had seen them cross the plank, and had followed hot-foot.

Neil's men threw away their red caps. 'Hurrah!' they yelled, and the whole crowd, some of them armed with anything they could pick up, rushed at the foe. A few of the hindmost French had turned at Neil's shout, but seeing one man, had paid little attention to him. As they turned again, the English sailors were upon them. For a minute or two Neil could not understand what had happened. By the time he did he was mixed up with the swaying, struggling mass of men, forced to defend himself, sick at heart owing to the failure of his plan, which, half mad though it was, had yet promised so well. Its results, however, were striking enough. Instead of its winning the day for the *Toulon*, it completed the rout of her crew. Attacked front and rear, the bewildered Frenchmen, who had been growing confident of victory, lost heart. They strove bravely, their captain falling, run through by Calthrop, who was an expert swordsman, but they fought in vain. A panic seized them; they threw down their arms and cried for quarter, which for a moment was denied them. They sprang below, and fled in all directions, hunted to death, till orders were obeyed after the tricolour was struck and the red cross in its place. Then, and not till then, did the roar of the great guns cease, and the hellish din come to an end, leaving two battered ships filled with the fruits of war.

The frigate, though the conqueror, had suffered more severely than her antagonist. John Gasket was no more. He had been promoted to the great majority by a shower of grape, and, whatever his faults, had died bravely enough. Out of a total ship's company of 272, no less than five-and-fifty had lost the number of their mess, and twice that number were wounded, some desperately. Of the *Toulon's* 330 souls, forty were ready for the sail-maker and the weighting-shot, and half as many crippled for life, while there was scarcely a prisoner without a wound of some sort.

The *Rattler* had to stand by her prize, which had received several shots between wind and water, while the frigate herself was in a sorry plight aloft, and her mizzen-mast, after seeing the fight through, collapsed, and added to the melancholy of the spectacle.

Neil Darroch was in a state of the utmost dejection. He took part with the rest of the crew in swabbing and clearing the decks, and this, added to his depression, nearly sickened him. His ruse had had exactly the opposite result from what he had intended. There was something ludicrous in its remarkable effects, but he was in no position to appreciate the grim humour of the situation. He felt dazed and stunned. While the ships bombarded each other he had forced himself to keep cool and collected, but when at last his opportunity came he had gone wild with excitement. He had been madly eager for success, fully realizing the boldness of his bid for freedom, and lo! he had, so to speak, cut his own throat. Curiously enough, the danger of his position did not appeal to him. He never thought of the men who had known his design and had followed him. It would be easy for them to denounce him and exonerate themselves. They had merely to assert that they had boarded the Frenchman from very different motives to those which had influenced their leader. Their acts spoke for themselves, and who was to deny the truth of such a statement? And yet Neil never troubled his head as to whether any of his band of irresolute traitors survived or not. As a matter of fact, only two of them had fallen, and there might be four witnesses to compass his ruin, for to be convicted of such a design could mean nothing but the death sentence and a hempen noose.

The first thing to rouse him was the news that Gasket was dead. The second was still more startling. He had been sent below with a gang of men, and as he returned on deck he happened to be the last of his party. The *Toulon* had been put to

rights by this time, cleaned and made ship-shape with that marvellous celerity which characterizes the man-of-war's man when he puts his back to a job. They were still busy on board the frigate, splicing and knotting, and bending new sails, for she was a terrible wreck aloft, but Calthrop had drawn up part of his command on the Frenchman's main deck and was already telling off a prize-crew. It was at this moment that Neil emerged from the hatchway, his tall figure dishevelled and begrimed, his clothes bloodstained, his face so black with powder that its miserable look could not be seen.

The instant the men caught sight of him they burst into round after round of cheering. In their hearty, manly way they forgot or put aside any past dislike to the silent, sneering man who, in their opinion, had acted like a hero and turned the tide of battle in their favour. The four men who knew differently chanced to be on board the *Rattler*, and they so far had held their tongues. Rough and ignorant, they were at first afraid to make any charge which might possibly reflect upon themselves. Their little game would probably be private blackmail, but as yet they had not had time to settle their plans.

So the others, never dreaming how far they were from the mark, gave vent to their feelings. Neil, downcast and bitter, had not the least idea that they were cheering him. He thought that the lieutenant had been addressing the men on their victory, and he wondered at the rapid change which had come over the sullen, dispirited crew, who, from being half mutineers, had cheerfully obeyed orders and fought, many of them to the death. He had yet to learn that the English seaman of that date was a curious mixture of good and bad; indeed, he did not in the least understand the English nature at all. He had judged them on the belief that they would act as did the MacGregors and MacPhersons at Dunblane, the

Macdonalds at Culloden, but in the Saxon there is not the same stubborn, insane pride as in the Celt. He had erred and paid heavily for his error.

Lieutenant Calthrop turned to see what was the matter. A smile came into his pale face, paler than ever, for he had a broken arm in a sling and a bandaged head.

He walked up to where Neil was standing, and held out his hand.

'I am proud of you, my man,' he said, in a loud voice; and then added in a half-whisper, 'You will come to my cabin at eight to-night, Darroch.'

The crew cheered again. Neil, scarce knowing what he did, took the officer's hand, and then, suddenly seeing what was meant, he started back, his face working convulsively, a hot feeling of shame rising within him.

'What's the matter?' said Calthrop kindly. 'Are you wounded?'

Neil could stand the stress no longer. These, the first friendly words he had heard for many a day, the startling ovation he had received, the knowledge of what all but himself would regard as base and low and traitorous, proved too much for him. To the lieutenant's astonishment, he gave a wild laugh, which had not a vestige of amusement in it, and rushed down the companion stairs. There he threw himself into a corner, and, strong, proud man though he was, gave way to a passionate burst of grief.

Mr. Calthrop had been at a loss to understand Neil's strange behaviour, but he knew how a battle will shake men's nerves, and though he rather feared the man might lose his reason, he hoped to find him recovered at their next interview.

His expectation was justified. Neil Darroch entered his presence calm and composed. His storm of sorrow had done him good. He had no feeling against Calthrop, and bowed as he was ushered in and found the lieutenant alone. The

comfort of the cabin, with its padded lockers, cheery oil-lamp, and sparkling glass, appealed to him. He was sick to death of his dark bunk and crowded quarters forward, sick of the coarseness of his companions, and the rough-and-ready fare he had been forced to consume. He thought he saw an end to it all, for he regarded Calthrop as a just man, and he held up his head proudly enough after acknowledging the officer's presence.

'Shut the door, Raites,' said Calthrop to the coxswain of the late captain's gig, who was in attendance, 'and tell the guard to let no one past without my orders.'

The man tugged at his forelock and withdrew.

'Now, sir,' said Calthrop, 'we are here as equals; take a seat and pour yourself out a finger's length.'

He pushed a square bottle in Neil's direction; he, however, shook his head.

'As you will, then,' said the lieutenant. 'But first I have to thank you for what you did to-day; you took a noble revenge upon us, and I for one heartily regret what has passed. There's my hand upon it.'

Neil flushed and half rose.

'I cannot,' he said hoarsely.

Calthrop looked surprised.

'I meant it kindly,' he said coldly; 'but, of course, if you prefer to——'

'No, no,' broke in Neil; 'you misunderstand me.'

He was upon his feet now, his face drawn and white, and Calthrop noticed how gaunt and haggard he had become.

'I beg your pardon, then,' said the lieutenant. 'You had better confide your whole story to me, and let me advise you. I have tried to get speech with you before, but you seemed to avoid me.'

This was perfectly true. Latterly Neil had been in no mood for sympathy, now he did not hesitate. He resolved to tell the truth and shame the devil, for

"What!" shouted Calthrop leaning across the table.—Page 139.

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somehow, since he had failed, his project looked blacker than previously, and he experienced a haunting sense of guilt.

'I have to thank you for your courtesy,' he said, in a low voice, 'but you have made a great mistake, sir. I am in a false position.'

'Of course, of course,' answered Calthrop testily—he hated long-windedness, this active little man—'we all know that.'

'No, sir, you do not,' said Neil firmly but quickly. 'I speak of to-day alone. You seemed to think I boarded the *Toulon* to bring you help. I did not.'

'What!' shouted Calthrop, leaning across the table. 'Pardon me,' he immediately added. 'but your statement bewilders, sir. What was your idea?'

'I went to help the French.'

'You damned traitor!' cried the little officer. 'This is too much!'

'I shall pass over your remark,' said Neil quietly, and almost as if he were the judge; 'only pray listen to me.'

'God knows if I should,' said Calthrop; 'it should be handcuffs at once.'

'I think, sir, I have the honour of addressing a gentleman.'

'Proceed,' said the lieutenant curtly.

And then Neil told his tale. He had not a little of his grandfather's talent for narration, and as he warmed in his speech the look of disgust left Calthrop's face.

'Think of it!' cried Neil as he came to speak of his flogging. 'Think of what it meant to me—the disgrace, the marks I can never get rid of, the forced submission to a brute like Gasket!'

Calthrop made a slight sign of dissent, but Neil never paused.

'Think of it, sir, and all without cause! And, then, what torture was that to inflict even for a blow—to be trussed like a fowl and half drowned like a

dog! Great heavens! I only wonder I did not tear him in pieces and make an end of myself. Look at me! People will take me for a felon. And, listen, this hatred of the English is in my blood. My grandfather was lashed as I have been, branded for life—and why? Because he did not fear to champion a just cause. I am partly a Frenchman by birth, and is it any wonder I turned against you? I am no traitor, sir, but I am a man who was desperate and hounded to this deed. Had I been in your place, I would not have suffered Gasket or anyone else to do what he did to a prisoner, innocent and defenceless.'

'We are not here to discuss my failings, Mr. Darroch, and you have not yet explained how the men came to follow you.'

Neil had no wish to incriminate the poor wretches.

'I suppose they thought as you did,' he said bitterly, 'and so came after me. You have heard my story. I have failed, and I cannot honestly say I am glad that I did not succeed.'

'A moment,' said Calthrop. 'Was it fear that the men might possibly suspect you and inform me that induced you to make this confession?'

'No, sir; it was not. I am not a cur, whatever my faults.'

'I believe you, Mr. Darroch, and I am glad of it. You have had a hard time and deserve sympathy. The point upon which I am inclined to lay most stress is your semi-French origin. In your position, I do not know but that I would have acted as you have done. I have no wish to speak evil of the dead, but our late captain is well away. For all that, his treatment would not have justified the course you took had you been an Englishman. As it is, I cannot find it in my heart to blame you, though I must decline your company. You will forgive my prejudices, but the very thought is distasteful to me, and yet you did a very brave thing, hang me, sir, if

you didn't! only I think you must have been mad, and no wonder, poor fellow, no wonder!'

As Lieutenant Calthrop concluded the longest speech he ever made in his life, he found it convenient to blow his nose vigorously and cough once or twice.

Neil stood silent, wondering what was to come next. Meanwhile Calthrop became again the quiet, self-possessed man he appeared in public. He motioned Neil to sit down.

'What you have just told me, Mr. Darroch,' he said, 'naturally alters my plans concerning you. I have said that I hold you free from punishment, but mark me, should the crew get an inkling of this it would be awkward. Have you any suggestion to make?'

'None, sir.'

'Very well, I think you had better return to Gibraltar in the prize. We are short of officers, and Mr. Bowling must take charge of her. Of course, you go as a seaman, but you should find opportunities to get home when you reach the port. I will give your officer a hint, as well as the master's mate who accompanies him. I wish no thanks, and I doubt much if I am doing my duty, but I shall answer for that some day, when, perhaps, we may meet again. I may say frankly I have no desire to fall in with you till then, Mr. Darroch, though I bear no malice. And now good-night. Might I ask you to send Raites to me? You sail at daybreak to-morrow, if the *Toulon's* leaks are got under by then.'

He turned to some papers on the table, and Neil, with a short bow, left him. He scarcely knew what to think. The lieutenant had been kind in a way of his own, but had scarcely veiled his contempt, although he had been at pains to view the matter from Neil's standpoint.

'He thinks I have done a vile thing,' groaned Neil to himself; 'but if only he had those scores upon his shoulders, if he could but understand what I have lost

besides! And yet,' he added fiercely, 'my time will come, and Geoffrey will smart all the more for what I have suffered.'

His head throbbed, his throat felt parched, and it was a very different man who boarded the *Toulon* for the second time.

The *Rattler* and her prize parted company as thin streaks of morning light showed away in the east, while it was yet half night, and the sea stretched faint and dark and ghostly on every hand, shrouding in its depths men who the day before had sailed it bravely, and now awaited the last trump and the giving up of its dead. There was no occasion for their having died; the battle had been a huge mistake. It had been a bad thing for poor Gasket that he had not touched at Gibraltar, for there he would have heard that peace had been concluded, and other news still more wonderful.

The *Rattler* stood off to the south and east with a jury-mast rigged; but her prize lay much where she was for a couple of days, as shortly after her consort's departure the mainmast went by the board in a totally unexpected manner, carried with it the foretop-mast, and crushed the larboard bulwarks and two of the prize crew. The others refitted her as best they could, but Neil Darroch was not of their number. He lay below in a half-unconscious state, and added another load of anxiety to the unhappy midshipman's already overburdened mind. Thus it happened that the British frigate *Undaunted*, making an offing from Marseilles and bound for the Gulf of St. Raphael on a unique mission, fell in with the drifting and disabled *Toulon*, and Captain Usher nearly scared Mr Bowling out of his wits. That dignified little mortal would take no help, but transhipped his invalid to the doctor's care, and quite forgot to send his strange and eventful story with him.

The *Undaunted* had been summoned by Colonel Campbell, the British Commissary, and no one on

board troubled himself much about the wretched man in the sick-bay, who raved and talked nonsense, for it was the general opinion that the *Undaunted* was to undertake a duty which would render her name historic. She was to convey the hapless Emperor from France to Elba, from what had been his empire to his island kingdom. But of all this Neil knew nothing. He did not hear the salute of twenty-four guns, the tribute Britain paid to her vanquished enemy. He did not see the square-set little man with the subdued look upon his somewhat puffy face, and the glitter in his eyes. He was not a witness of the remarkable change Napoleon wrought in the feelings of the English seamen towards him ere four days had passed. Inclined at first to exult over his misfortune, they had found him affable. He was pleased to be amused at their coarse humour. He even tried to converse with them, and laughed at his own mistakes. There was a curious blending of dignity and dejection in his bearing, a gentle sadness which became him well, and touched even the rough-and-ready man-o'-war's men. By the time he disembarked at Porto Ferrajo he was a prime favourite with every man and boy on board, who had watched him during a trying time, which had followed what was perhaps the most dangerous period in his career.

As a salvo of one-and-twenty guns roared its parting from the frigate, and was answered by a similar greeting from the forts Stella and Falcone, the British crew with one accord joined in the cheering which welcomed the ruler to his mockery of a kingdom, and the great hills around echoed and re-echoed to the unwonted sound. But of all this Neil Darroch knew nothing; he lay in a state of blissful stupor in the sick-bay of the *Undaunted*.

CHAPTER V.

CRASPINAT

ALTHOUGH Carlo Massoni knew where Craspinat lodged, although he had visited the place before, yet he experienced a difficulty in finding it again. Not that this was wonderful. Paris, though greatly altered, still contained parts where the narrow, filthy, and winding streets constituted a maze through which a man might wander from one tortuous lane to another, and find no landmark to guide him.

It was in such a spot that the thing called Craspinat had its abode, an underground dwelling, dark and dismal, which the sun's light never reached—the very existence of which was unknown to those who lived hard by; for this Craspinat was a night-bird. It is strange how, in most people, we can, by careful scrutiny, detect a resemblance to the lower animals. One man irresistibly reminds us of a dog; we speak of a cat-like woman; a starved and wizened child may be the image of a monkey. Emile d'Herbois, as we have seen—in outward appearance, at least—took after the weasel tribe, Van Hagen had the characteristics of a fish, but Craspinat was something worse.

This creature, which seemed scarcely human, so repulsive was it in body and mind, so horribly shaped, so grotesque in expression, so hideous in movement, suggested nothing so much as a huge spider. Not, indeed, the harmless fly-sucker, useful and diligent, with his graceful web and cunningly hidden lair, but rather some noxious tarantula, brown, hairy and poisonous, an insect loathsome and repellent. There had been a blight upon it from its birth. It was a deformity and an abortion which should have been

killed as soon as its eyes opened—as soon as it drew breath.

It is not easy to portray Craspinat. Imagine a form in man's clothing with legs which could meet at the ankles, and not again till they reached the trunk, short, thick-set limbs, each describing a curve like the wood of a strung bow. Picture, further, a body as broad as it was long, and strangely bent to one side and upon itself, skinny arms reaching to the knees when allowed to hang downwards, and covered with a downy, reddish hair, shoulders hunched and angular, and then a head. From the front there was no neck to be seen. The chin rested constantly upon the chest. It could move slightly from side to side, but not up and down. The reason is simple. The muscles at the back of the neck—for a neck there was—had been severed, and had not properly united; further, the vertebræ had been injured. Those who knew Craspinat knew the cause. La guillotine, they whispered, had been blunt one day, now long, long ago.

But one forgot the legs and even the body when one viewed the face of this monstrosity. And yet there was not much face to be seen. The hair of the head shaded it down to the eyes, which men said were green, like those of a cat in the dark. The hair which grew upon it shaded it elsewhere, save for two patches of reddish skin on either side of a protuberant nose, and a prehensile upper lip, from below which protruded one solitary fang, both long and yellow. But there was something unwholesome about this beard, as about everything else connected with Craspinat. It was weak and, though plentifully distributed, grew sparsely; there was a lack of firmness and cohesion about it; it recalled the feathers of a moulting fowl. Such was Craspinat, whom Carlo Massoni had recommended to his friend Emile d'Herbois.

It may perhaps be supposed that his choice was a bad one, that such a creature was no fit companion

for any man, that its brain must be on a par with the organism it ruled; but this was not the case. Craspinat was stunted in body, but not in mind, unless a low morality is taken as evidence of such a process. That mind was useful, not to its owner only, for Craspinat was an intelligence department. There was no spot in Paris, however obscure, which Craspinat did not know. Those who had dealings with this extraordinary being said:

'He himself lives in the best-hidden corner of the city; it is, therefore, natural he should have learned its mysterious quarters, for he must have visited them all ere he fixed on his cellar.'

The conclusion was certainly legitimate.

The police were fools to Craspinat, and of this they were aware. When, therefore, they were baffled, they said: 'Let us apply to the ogre'; and it was rarely they applied in vain. They were suspicious of their frequent informant, but, as Savary once remarked: 'He is invaluable, and the end justifies the means.' It is the creed of the Jesuit, but it was true of Craspinat.

There was probably only one man in Paris who was thoroughly conversant with Craspinat's history, and that man was Carlo Massoni. Many had known it in earlier days, but these had been days of very rapid change. The death-rate was high in Paris when Craspinat was middle-aged and Massoni was young.

The Corsican had prevented the knife shearing completely through that neck which had once been straight and supple enough, and this was the chief tie which bound the two together, for Craspinat was not destitute of affection.

The chief tie, we have said, and with reason, for there were others. This weird mortal's business in life was believed to be that of a detective, but although skilled in disguises, fertile in suggestions, and sought after by many clients, both rich and

poor, although consulted about all things, from such a trivial matter as a lost child to such a grave question as the spiriting away of a bag of gold; this was not so. These were Craspinat's amusements; the business of this blighted life was the study of explosives. Hence was Carlo Massoni interested.

There could be no doubt, they said, that Craspinat was mad, but it was a madness with a method in it. It was said, 'He is rich—fabulous sums have been paid to him'; but this was an error—in part, at least. All that Craspinat made by amusements was spent upon this strange hobby. That is why Carlo Massoni spoke of 'my bomb-maker.'

At the time with which we deal Craspinat was ill. Carlo Massoni had said:

'You need good food; you need light and air; you are not healthy, and no wonder, living in such a den. You have established such a system that it is not necessary for you to stay here longer, and in any case folks are now so poor, thanks to Napoleon, that it does not pay you, and you are in danger, for you know too much. They will send and kill you some fine night. Be guided by me, and I will find you a home where you will be safe.'

To this Craspinat agreed.

Emile d'Herbois' house was a little like himself. It was, so to speak, in touch with the world, but retired from it. It stood in a lane which ran off the old Rue de Gramont, close to the river, in a deserted neighbourhood, and yet not a hundred miles from the Place Bastille and the busy streets which lead from and to that spot of ghastly memories.

Here Craspinat found an asylum, though M. d'Herbois had at first been horrified at the very idea of harbouring such a 'parody of a human being,' for this was the expression he used to describe his visitor.

But Massoni had over-persuaded him, had begged

that a trial might be given, and Emile d'Herbois had a soft heart. Suffering in any form appealed to him, hence his failure as a Jacobin; and so at last against his better judgment he consented, and assigned Craspinat—there was no other name—a room in the basement and at the back of the house.

He was forced to confess that Massoni had not lied to him. Information formerly difficult, nay, impossible to obtain was now so no longer. There was no trouble, no fuss. His old servant, who had been in a frenzy when she saw the new occupant, became speedily reconciled. 'He would scare the bravest burglar that ever walked,' she said.

The Corsican had been careful not to mention the true nature of Craspinat's pursuits. He had merely spoken vaguely of a love for chemistry, and had tapped his forehead significantly.

So Craspinat was left to work in peace.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY.

MASSONI, after arranging everything to his satisfaction, departed for his native island, there to carry out his intentions regarding the man called Jules Gironde, who had presumed to thwart his plans. If during his journey he had been able to look into his friend's house in the Rue de Gramont, he would have been both surprised and annoyed, for it soon contained others besides D'Herbois, his servant, and the creature which resided in the basement, and never left it, at least by day.

These fresh arrivals were a young girl of uncommon beauty, dressed in a fashion long defunct, and an old man, who seemed fond of bright colours, to judge from his garments.

It was a strange story that was told Emile d'Herbois by his niece, who with this Monsieur Deschamps had arrived before the letter which she asserted had been sent him, but which was never delivered. There was nothing in her uncle's manner to lead Kate Ingleby to suppose that she was not welcome. Emile d'Herbois saw his schemes again frustrated, but he did not dream of renouncing the charge given him by his dying sister, neither did he think of using the friendless girl's fortune to further his ambition.

'Let her come of age and judge for herself,' he said. 'I will instil those principles which have guided my life, and if she approves them, good and well, if not——'

He sighed deeply, and quickened his already hasty walk. No man had ever accused Emile d'Herbois of doing anything dishonourable. That is why none guessed whither Craspinat had gone, for the Jacobin's servant implicitly obeyed her master, and he had enforced secrecy on this point.

He listened with amazement to Kate Ingleby's account of the adventures which had befallen her, and looked askance on poor Charles Deschamps. He pitied the man, but he loathed the aristocrat.

'And so,' said the girl, continuing her tale, 'I could not help suspecting Geoffrey Darroch. Monsieur Deschamps here would tell me nothing, but hinted at something he had seen, and as the day wore on, I grew very frightened and uncomfortable. There was no sign of Monsieur Neil, and his brother went out and did not return till late, when he said he feared the smugglers had carried him off.'

She stopped, and he saw there were tears in her eyes.

'Poor Noël, poor Noël! he was a good lad,' muttered the old Frenchman. 'Your pardon, sir,' he added, as if ashamed of his grief before a stranger.

Emile d'Herbois nodded and proffered his snuff-

box, but the other took no notice. He was absorbed in his own wandering thoughts.

'Then, uncle'—she said the word as if not used to it—'I did a stupid thing, and let him see what was in my mind. Ah! but he must have been guilty; you should have seen his passion! Till then I had thought him a stupid man, though kind, but my eyes were opened. I answered him back for a little'—she smiled bravely as she spoke—'but then I saw he was drunk, and I was afraid, and locked myself into my room, and he stood outside and tried to force the door, and swore he would kill me.'

'And then?' said her uncle. 'Go on, Catherine; you interest me.'

'Then he'—she glanced at her companion—'came to the rescue. I heard them having high words. I know that Monsieur Darroch struck Monsieur Deschamps, and'—she lowered her voice—'he cannot stand a blow or a harsh word.'

'He shall have neither here,' said Emile d'Herbois decisively. 'Accept my thanks for the protection you afforded my niece,' he added, turning to Monsieur Charles.

The latter roused himself, and once more his old cheery smile played amongst the wrinkles on his face. He waved his hand with the grand air.

'No thanks are due,' he said; 'to be in mademoiselle's company is sufficient pleasure.' His dark eyes, which had a weary look in them, rested lovingly on the bright young face at his side. Where had he seen one like it? he asked himself, as he had so often done, but with the same result. The past was still a blank to Monsieur Deschamps.

'What you say is highly gratifying to me,' said Uncle Emile; 'but, Catherine, I am anxious to learn how you escaped from this Scottish castle and the villain—for such he seems to be—who owns it.'

'There is not much to tell,' answered Kate. 'I did not sleep all that terrible night, but in the morn-

ing my old friend came and told me that Monsieur Darroch was dead drunk, and could do no harm. Then when I had found this was true, the housekeeper took me to see a man who was in the kitchen. I have never encountered anyone so strange, so picturesque. He was—how am I to explain?—the musician to the wild smugglers, and he was very old, but still strong and vigorous. His beard was long, and very white, but it was his eyes which fascinated me. They were deep-set in his head, and glowed as if candles were placed behind them, while his brows were shaggy and frowning. He had, so Teeny told me, what they call the second sight; he was a prophet indeed, but for all that he could speak no English, at least that I could understand.'

Emile d'Herbois smiled, and dabbed at his snuff.

'You are laughing,' said Kate gravely, 'but you would not have laughed had you heard him. He got up and made me an oration, and waved his arms, and shook his fist, and groaned, and even wept. It is not nice to see an old man weep. When he had finished and gone away, the housekeeper told me that all the other smugglers had left the Black Glen, but he had refused to quit it. He had come to the house to ask Monsieur Neil if he might stay there, but when he found what had happened he had flown into a terrible rage, and spoken of some ship or other, and vowed vengeance, and warned me to fly with Monsieur Deschamps. Teeny advised me to do as he said, and we went away that very day to a little town called Portroy, where she remained behind while we sailed to Glasgow; but first I left a note in case Monsieur Neil should return, yet I fear he must be dead.' Her voice sank to a whisper which had a tremor in it.

'No, no,' said Charles Deschamps suddenly; 'he is not dead, not dead.'

'Ah! that is what he always says, but he knows nothing for certain.'

'Indeed!' said her uncle; 'but you would need money to travel, and you had none.'

'Yes, but Monsieur Deschamps had, and how do you think he made most of it? It is odd, but pitiful. All the years he was there he used to tell the fisher children stories, and their mothers would give him sous—pennies they call them. He had put them aside, and was saving them till he had enough to carry him home to Paris.'

'And had he?'

'No, not even half; but Teeny, who was a good woman, lent me the rest. I promised you would pay her for me.'

'It shall be done,' said Emile d'Herbois. 'And did the man follow you?'

'I know no more,' said she. 'We were just in time to sail. I thought it the best thing to do, but I have often wondered what happened.'

What had happened was that Geoffrey Darroch wakened from a two days' orgie to find himself in a burning house, and was only saved by his knowledge of the passage which led to the Cowrie caves.

A body, indeed, they found among the ruins, but it was not his. Once more, and once only, shall we meet with him again. Suffice it to say that, ruined in pocket, consumed by remorse, haunted by visions of the gallows and what he had lost, Geoffrey Darroch proved to the hilt the truth of that grim passage, 'The way of transgressors is hard.'

Now began as pleasant a time as Emile d'Herbois had ever known in his life, and that although he had relinquished for the present his great scheme of re-establishing a republic on a new basis. He had always been a solitary man, and this niece of his was a revelation to him. He would check his hurried, restless movements, and listen to her with a smile on his thin lips. He perceived with pleasure that she had an ample share of sound common-sense, a virtue he believed that he himself possessed in no small

measure, whereas in reality he was very much of a dreamer and an enthusiast. He had asked why she did not inform the authorities as to Neil Darroch's disappearance, and he noted her reply with satisfaction.

'What good would it have done?' she said. 'I had no proofs, no witnesses, and they might have detained me till his brother came, and then I would have been lost. A woman, you know, has not much chance with a man if she is a stranger and a foreigner.'

'True,' he answered; 'and now tell me of your journey here.'

Her account always delighted him. She had used her eyes to good purpose, and as he had been in England he could appreciate her descriptions of the coach-roads and the people she had met.

Above all, she made him comfortable. Much of his apparent energy was wasted; he was absent-minded, and in a very short time she took charge of his domestic arrangements, went to the market, accompanied by Monsieur Deschamps, and brought him all the news, along with dainty tit-bits, much to his liking, for Emile d'Herbois was a good Parisian in that he enjoyed a *recherché* dinner. He was gratified to find her a little republican already.

'Kings are either wicked and tyrants, or weak and useless, and they are a great expense,' was her dictum.

It was not long before she found out his secret, and embarrassed him by putting half her fortune (she was too good an American to offer the whole) at his disposal.

'You are a good child,' he said; 'but there is no hurry. Wait till you have seen more, and are of age; then we shall see. There is plenty of time yet. I am not an old man.'

Unfortunately, he forgot Craspinat. That strange mortal was invisible. Kate Ingleby did not know there was such a being in the house.

Nowadays we hear of curious photographs, which show that spirits, good and evil, hover near us. The dead mother guards her sleeping child, some emissary of the devil sits at the gambler's elbow, and no one ever guesses it.

Craspinat, for all that the new-comers in Emile d'Herbois' house saw or heard, might have been one of these. But Craspinat knew all that was occurring, and knew what the girl's arrival signified.

'There is plenty of time,' was Emile d'Herbois' motto. It was also Craspinat's.

As may be imagined, Kate's new life was very much to her liking. Everything was novel and interesting, and she had no desire to play the grand lady. Her uncle was, as he well might be, indulgent, but her tastes were simple. She seemed perfectly happy, yet once or twice Emile d'Herbois got a glimpse of what he had surmised. She had not forgotten Neil Darroch.

'He may be living,' she said wistfully, 'and what if he should come here?'

'Impossible,' said her uncle.

'Why?' she asked. 'If he were really carried off by the smugglers, it is quite likely. Their trade I know—for so he told me—was partly with France and Holland, and he might escape and come here.'

'And why here?'

She reddened ever so little, but he read the danger-signal.

'Well, do you not see that as he wrote you, even though the letter has never come, he must know where you live; he would want help, and he might think, you see——'

'I see,' said Emile d'Herbois, and Kate hid her confusion—and her tears, if truth be told—by running off to greet Monsieur Charles, who happened to enter the room just at that critical moment.

Emile d'Herbois had a soft heart, as we have said, and he felt sorry for the lass; but she was apparently

not smitten too deeply, and so, as was his custom, he put his trust in time. He had done so all his life, and the result was he had accomplished nothing. Time is not to be trusted; he is to be taken by the forelock.

To one, however, time meant nothing, and that one was Monsieur Deschamps. He speedily forgot Neil in the excitement of being again in the city of his youth, and yet he was bewildered. Since he had quitted it, Paris was indeed changed. Over four millions in English money had Napoleon expended on his capital, and even poor Monsieur Charles could trace his handiwork. He would accompany Kate here and there, and stand sucking at the silver top of a cane she had bought him as a plaything the while he gazed disconsolately about him. He said little, but it was clear that his feeble brain was questioning, ever questioning, and yet never answering, or even voicing its own confused inquiries. But he was brightening up. He no longer shuffled and was untidy in his dress. The sudden alteration in his surroundings had done him good, and Kate Ingleby was delighted.

'Oh, if he could only be cured,' she thought, 'and then if Neil—Mr. Darroch, I mean—could see him!'

Such fleeting ideas ended in a sigh and additional kindness to the old Frenchman, her sole link with the past.

Monsieur would never have recovered, but he might have improved even more, and in good time got rid of his despondent fits and many of his childish ways, but for an event which befell some months after he had again made acquaintance with the streets he had paced before madness fastened upon both his country and himself.

There was a garden attached to Emile d'Herbois' old house, a pleasant enough spot which had lain fallow till Kate Ingleby took it in hand and planted bulbs and tended drooping shrubs.

Here it was that when the demon of unrest forced him out of doors with the first streak of light, Monsieur Charles would wander up and down, cane in hand, talking to himself and the sparrows. A high wall surrounded it, and close to one angle was a little door which gave access to a dismal lane that led to the river.

The old man had been promenading briskly in his shirt and small clothes—for he was not susceptible to cold—when he heard a sound which attracted his attention. He was near the house, behind a large bush which concealed the greater portion of the garden from his view. Always inclined to be suspicious, he kept himself concealed, and half-playfully peered round the ragged edge of his hiding-place.

He was not the only occupant of the garden. A figure was closing the little door in the wall—the figure of a man whose back was towards him, but such a figure!

Squat and bent like a hobgoblin, with shaggy head and distorted legs, it was working at the lock. Its shape was enough to scare anyone, so out of place was it in the stillness of a fresh summer's morn; but its effect on Monsieur Deschamps was extraordinary.

Great beads of sweat burst out upon the skin of his forehead, his gentle eyes seemed as if they would start from their sockets, and in them was a look which had long been absent from them—a look of remembrance and recognition. His lips trembled, his very body shook as though smitten by the palsy; the cane, his newest and dearest possession, dropped unheeded on the grass, and then he became petrified, rigid, motionless, and his expression changed. He was waiting to see the face.

But who shall say what memories were struggling to life in his enfeebled nerve-cells—memories of a fearful day of misery and slaughter, of ruthless massacre and outrage, when in the court of the Abbaye a howling mob had danced and yelled like

heathen cannibals, and glutted their ferocity in the best blood of France? Did he know now of whom mademoiselle reminded him? The fair young face of his betrothed, which he had last seen—God help him! —borne upon a pike, borne high upon a pike, and by whom?

Yes, there could be no doubt; the dress was different, but the figure was the same; the twisted figure, and not only the figure, but its visage, the ghoulish, hairy visage of Craspinat.

With a scream, a choking scream like that of a child which in the dark throws out a hand and touches the fur of a cat seated on its chest—with such a scream of the most intense horror, the most abject terror, Charles Deschamps spun round, fell on his hands and knees and crawled into the house, gibbering and raving—ay, and laughing, as the souls may laugh in hell.

Monsieur Deschamps did not make his usual appearance with the rolls and coffee that morning. When Kate Ingleby went in search of him, what she found crouching in a dark closet was not the Charles Deschamps she had known.

Hastily, in great fear, with a sinking heart, and all the brightness gone from her face, she summoned Emile d'Herbois, and he summoned his physician. That kindly man made a few inquiries, and shook his head.

'He has had a fright,' he said. 'Should he become violent he must be put under restraint, but I do not think it will be necessary. Get him to bed in a darkened room, keep him absolutely quiet, and I will come again.'

He came, and gave it as his opinion that his patient had not a vestige of reason left, that he might live for quite a lengthened period, but would get no better —he could scarcely become worse.

'And how can it have happened?' sobbed the girl. 'Who could have terrified him?'

Emile d'Herbois guessed, but shook his head.

The affair roused him, however. He resolved to go and question this Craspinat.

Since Massoni left he had scarcely seen the creature he had taken in out of charity and to serve his own ends. He had preferred to communicate his wishes by writing and receive written or rather scrawled reports. The reason is simple: he was afraid.

There was something so silent and mysterious in this dependent of his, that Emile d'Herbois avoided the basement. He told himself there was no need for him to go there, and it was in a manner true. His servant never complained, there had been no disturbance of any kind. But now he felt it his duty to find out if Craspinat had been up to any tricks, though he believed the old Frenchman had lost the remainder of his wits merely on account of the grotesque hideousness of a face which he had probably seen by chance.

Still, it is significant that when D'Herbois descended to the basement, he carried a stout cudgel in his hand, and had a loaded pistol in his pocket.

The door of Craspinat's room was locked. Monsieur d'Herbois knocked loudly upon it. A man often makes most noise when he is timid. Craspinat was probably aware of this, for the face which greeted d'Herbois when the door opened had a leer upon it.

'I wished to see you,' said Emile d'Herbois.

'And I am here,' was the reply, in a thin, shrill voice, which affected D'Herbois unpleasantly.

The figure before him made no sign of moving out of the way, and so he pushed quickly past it.

He was sufficiently surprised by what he saw. Barrels and cases were ranged against the walls, curious vessels and pieces of metal littered a table, a charcoal fire burnt on a stone slab, and its fumes were conducted by a pipe through one of the window-panes.

'You have a fine mess here,' he said angrily. 'What are you doing?'

There was no answer.

Somehow or other he did not feel inclined to repeat the question just then.

'Do you know anything of what happened yesterday?' he asked.

'I have heard the old man is madder than he was,' whined the creature before him; 'but I am not to blame. I did not make myself, good sir.'

'Then you have been playing no tricks?' he demanded.

'Tricks? No, no. I have served you well in everything, have I not?'

'That is true, but I think I can dispense with you now. You are strong again, and so had better go. I will pay you for the trouble you have taken.'

'But the Signor Massoni said I was to stay till he returned.'

'I have nothing to do with what he said. This is my house, and I shall have in it whom I please.'

He stopped. Was it possible that the thing was laughing at him? Emile d'Herbois began to grow angry.

'What is this?' he asked, and gathered a black powder from a barrel. He dropped it quickly.

'Confound you!' he cried. 'What devil's business are you at here? Would you blow us all up? Out you bundle, and all your stuff along with you!'

'No, no!' cried the creature shrilly—'no no, Monsieur d'Herbois! I am here and I shall stay.'

'But I say you shall go!' repeated D'Herbois. 'If the police knew of this——'

'They would do nothing,' said Craspinat, with a dry cackle.

'Then, I will!' shouted the other, raising his stick. 'Go before I thrash you, miserable wretch though you are.'

'Ha, ha!' screamed the figure before him, com-

mencing to dance and hop upon the floor, and snapping its fingers in his face. 'You dare not touch me!'

'Dare not! And why not, pray?' stammered D'Herbois, amazed at the audacity of this deformed being.

'That is why—one reason why!' it shrilled, raising a long arm and plucking off first a wig and then the shaggy straggling hairs which covered its face.

Emile d'Herbois staggered back, speechless with surprise, and gazed at a countenance which, though the prey of some loathsome disease, was yet distinctive.

Craspinat was a woman!

BOOK III.

REVENGE

CHAPTER I.

FROM PERIL TO PERIL

TO-DAY Elba is deserted. Cook's tours, like the Levite, pass by on the other side—the other side of the Straits of Piombino, which separate it from the coast of Tuscany. It lies out of the track of the globe-trotter, it is unknown and unvisited save by a passing yacht and a few Napoleonic enthusiasts. And yet there is, perhaps, no finer bay in Europe than that of Porto Ferrajo. In the straits lie the islets of Palmajola and Cerboli, topped by fair white buildings; and as one rounds the green Capo della Vita, a vista of majestic beauty is disclosed. In front lies a great stretch of water on which a navy might ride. To the left tower mighty hills, shooting sheer upwards from the green sea, veined by the red, iron-bearing rocks, and narrowing to ragged peaks and ridges. From the face of one curving hill a vast pinnacle rises clear against the blue sky, a pinnacle crowned by an ancient temple to almighty Jove. Beyond, the mountains recede from the bay and sweep round the valley land in a great semicircle, finally ending in a low promontory, which in its fold hides the little town whose houses rise tier upon tier,

white and yellow and red, flanked by two old forts, guarded by a crumbling wall, smelling of the east, quaint, irregular, and fascinating. Gateways and moats still exist, narrow lanes, black and dismal by night, cool and shady by day, run here and there. The town seems almost to overhang the still waters of the bay, so that one looks up from the quay at terraces and balconies, and roofs overlapping each other in a fine confusion. A pink marl coats the toy-like harbour works, which, with the Bagno, alone show no sign of decay. Porto Ferrajo is gloriously sleepy, content with its brief forgotten fame, for does it not hold the Villa San Martino, where dwelt the Emperor, at once its prisoner and its King? Away inland, towards the hill range, built indeed upon its lower slopes, lies his palace, with its long avenue, its great gates and gilded eagles, its roof garden, its cool, pure white stone, its wonderful prospect of sea and hill and distant town, and above all, its air of melancholy. The grim, dark wood of huge conifers in whose shade it rests is more in keeping with its history than its trim garden, gay with flowers and sweet with scents. The vine-clad spurs mount up behind it, a background sombre and fitting, its gallery re-echoes to the tread of strangers, it is full of relics, relics of the fallen great.

But when the *Undaunted* lay in the bay of Porto Ferrajo, the town was delirious with joy. Its inhabitants looked forward to an era of unexampled prosperity, to a model government, to wealth and fame, and a great future. They were to be bitterly disappointed. There were fêtes and ceremonies, but the Emperor's face was gloomy. He wearied his attendants by a restless energy, by a ceaseless flow of questions. He rose at unearthly hours, to the disgust of the members of his suite, and yet they pitied him. He could not blot out the past.

Louis XVIII. entered Paris on the very day that the British frigate cast anchor in the roads.

Of all this bustle Neil Darroch, as we have said, knew nothing. He came to his senses at last, weak and wasted, and found himself in a hammock close beside an open port. He looked out and was filled with pleasure. He feasted his eyes upon the hills, about the tops of which the mists clung, casting long shadows on the barren slopes.

The scenery of Elba is at times singularly like that of the Scottish West Coast. Given a cloudy day, with gentle rain, the mountains might be those of Arran, save that they are scarcely so bluff and massive. They spoke of home to Neil Darroch, and with the thought of home came the thought of revenge. He was strangely persistent. Never for a moment had he forgotten the debt he owed his step-brother. He might have recognised the truth of that solemn text, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' but his warnings had been futile, his heredity had been too strong for him; such wrath as his was not to be easily quelled.

He did not stay long on the *Undaunted*. He learned where he was, and found that it would be useless for him to try to get anyone to believe his strange story.

The doctor, as the ship's surgeon was always called in those days, had detected the long white weals on his back. The man who brought him his meals hinted at them and winked knowingly. Neil felt the bitterness of shame. He resolved to escape as soon as he was strong enough. The Italian coast was not far off, and it was better to be free and penniless, he argued, than to be under orders and suspected. As soon as he was on his feet and beginning to gather strength he commenced watching for an opportunity.

At last, as he fondly imagined, fortune favoured him. One of the small, felucca-rigged craft employed in the sardine fishery anchored for the night about a hundred yards from the frigate. Neil watched her

crew furl the sail, put things ship-shape, and push off for the shore in their shallop. He had borrowed a stout clasp-knife from one of the sailors wherewith to whittle wood and pass the time, and he resolved to test it on the rope of the fishing-craft. There was plenty of wind; had he only known it, there was too much.

The bay of Porto Ferrajo is sheltered from every quarter of the compass, but of this Neil Darroch was ignorant. He trusted to luck to find food and water on board. In any case the voyage would be short, though he had decided it would be useless to hide himself on the island. The theft of the boat did not trouble him. A desperate man does not stick at trifles, and Neil Darroch was scarcely so particular as he had been.

He was pleased to find the night dark and cloudy, with no phosphorescence in the water. Somewhere in the small hours of the morning he paid out a length of cable from the port, made it fast, and slipped quietly down it. The frigate was in harbour, and the watch taking things easily. They never heard him. He had been careful to locate the position of the boat, and swam straight for it. So exhausted was he that he had to hang on to its gunwale for a time before he recovered sufficiently to hoist himself on board. Then all was easy. A slash with the knife freed the bow, the oars were handy, and very slowly he began to creep seawards. He had got some notion of the shape of the bay from a map the doctor had lent him, and even in the darkness it was not difficult to steer a course. His chief danger lay in passing other vessels, for there was a crowd of shipping in the roads. He was hailed more than once, and kept silent or answered gruffly in French.

In a very short time he was skirting the sea-washed base of Monte Grosso, which rose on his right, a black precipitous wall, and he began to comprehend the real nature of his undertaking. An easterly gale was

sweeping down from the Apennines, and away in front of him he could hear the roar of the breakers as they beat on the Capo della Vita, and dashed on the little isolated rock which stands like a sentinel before it. The waves were swirling round it like white-plumed cavalry on the wheel, and as they ran along the western side of the promontory his boat began to dance upon them and to ship spray. But he could not turn back. He pulled off shore, and, hoisting sail, scudded out into the waste of waters. He sped along with a mere rag of canvas showing till Elba had long vanished in the gloom, and then, going about, he commenced to beat to the south, trying to run towards the Tuscan coast, but trying in vain. Even in the darkness he could soon tell that he was making no headway.

Again he tacked and drove to the north-west, heading, though he knew it not, for Capraya, the island of the wild goats. But the elements were against him. Every tack he made, he lost ground. The sea grew wilder; the billows buffeted his boat's bow, and she fell off from the wind. He was far from skilful, and at last, drenched and desponding, gave up the struggle and ran blindly before the gale, the towering surges chasing him and threatening to swamp his tiny craft. He sat, wet and miserable, in the stern, holding the sheet in one hand, the tiller in the other, and scarcely caring what became of him. Long before morning broke he had to ride it out with the oars as a sea-anchor, drifting steadily to the westward. There was a little food and a keg of fresh water on board, sufficient, he hoped, to last him till he reached land of some description, if he survived the storm.

He was nearer safety than he thought. Both sea and wind began to subside as the pale dawn spread over the vault. He looked to the east, and saw far away on the horizon the outlines of two islands, cloudy and mysterious, till the morning sun struck upon

them, and they showed as dark masses rising high from the water plain. They were Elba and Capraya.

But long before his attention was directed elsewhere. Out of the darkness behind him loomed something huge and black and indistinct. Suddenly it began to take shape, and as the light of a new day stretched in lemon-coloured streaks across the sky, he saw that it was land. A misty vapour rolled upwards, and revealed a line of low hills, green and brown, a rocky coast frilled by surf, and a bold headland. To the south the sky took on a rosy hue, and there also the veil of night began to lift. It thinned as it rose, thinned to filmy streamers like white smoke, and disclosed a long coast line, with the same low hills climbing up from it. The mist curtain dispersed still more, a faint blue tinge crept up from the west, and there, piled one upon another, rose peak on peak, the highest glistening a dazzling white, as its snow-covered top caught a shaft of sunlight.

It was the inland mountain chain of Corsica. Neil Darroch guessed as much. He remembered having noted it on the map, but it was hard to realize that an island could hold such rocky giants as those which reared up, gray and rugged, behind the bulwark of lower hills. One of the wonders of Corsica is the loftiness of its summits. Its area is comparatively small, and yet its mountain-tops rise 7,000 and 8,000 feet above the level of the Mediterranean, crowded together, separated from one another by deep rifts and forest-clad valleys, by mighty precipices and narrow gorges. It is like a wide continent in miniature. Neil Darroch hailed it with delight. He dragged the oars abroad, hoisted his soaking sail, and made straight for it, tossing and pitching on the lively waves, which ran towards the beach. He was some three miles away, and long before he drew near he could see clumps of trees, and here and there white buildings dotted the vivid green of the slopes.

These were few in number, for Cape Corso is but sparsely inhabited, and its villages are small.

He headed for a spot where there was no sign of life, as he was doubtful as to his reception. It was merry work threshing along before a strong breeze, and Neil's spirits rose. His languor left him; he forgot his weariness and feebleness, and fixed his eyes eagerly on this new land whither he had drifted. On he drove, till he caught sight of a little bay between the fringing rocks, over which the spray was flying in showers. He steered carefully towards it; the boat was caught up by one breaker after another, came crunching down upon a sunken reef, half filled, was washed clear, and finally, with her bottom stove in, was hurled up on a stretch of silvery sand.

Neil leapt out, leaving his craft to her fate. He staggered a short way, and then sat down, a prayer of thankfulness rising to his lips. He caught at the soft dry sand and let it trickle through his fingers; he laughed to himself, and shook his fist at the sea. The reaction was so great that he felt like a child and behaved like one. When he had rested he got upon his feet and looked about him. A path ran along the shore at the base of a steep slope, which was covered with low-growing trees and shrubs. The latter was the Corsican macchie and was sprinkled with blossoms white and red. A heavy scent as of sweet-smelling musk was wafted to him. The air seemed full of aromatic odours. The rocky bank in which the beach ended, and which was topped by the dry, white road, was covered with vegetation. Bunches of dark-leaved plants bedecked it, tiny purple and crimson flowers peeped out from its crannies, strange cactus-like forms, pulpy and spiny, stood stiff and erect amongst the trailing undergrowth. The place resembled a shrubbery formed to delight the eye and perfume the air. Everywhere he looked there was bright colouring, the waves a

brilliant blue, the sand and spray a dazzling white, the hills behind green and pearly gray.

Corsica, where it is not barren and sterile, is a veritable garden. Neil stood entranced, as if it were all a dream, which would vanish for ever. The sight of the boat lying broadside to the beach, and beating itself to pieces, recalled him to his position. He waded in beside it, and secured what food was left, dried fish and raw macaroni. Then, returning, he stripped to the skin and spread out his clothes to dry. It was already growing hot. Bright-eyed lizards came forth from holes and sunned themselves. Birds twittered merrily amongst the bushes. There was something in the life and gaiety of his surroundings which brought back Kate Ingleby to his mind. For weeks he had resolutely thrust all thought of her aside, for such thoughts had been torture to him. Now, however, that he was again his own master that hope which, thank God! is so rarely absent altogether from the most unhappy, sprang up again within him. She might have met Mr. Quill and reached Paris after all, and he himself was not so far from France.

With a lighter heart than he had known for many a day Neil made a scanty breakfast, and set off along the road—a road fringed by tall grasses and the weird prickly pear, lined on one side by high banks of reddish soil, over which hung masses of golden spurge, on whose crests nodded tall foxgloves. As he approached in the boat, he had seen a village with a watch-tower to the north of him, situated on a promontory which jutted far out into the sea. He took the opposite direction, and trudged steadily along, half wondering if he were in fairyland. His musings were rudely interrupted. As he rounded a corner, the black barrel of a musket was thrust over the top of a boulder, and a voice called out in French:

'Halt, there! Throw up your arms!'

He stopped, and involuntarily did as he was bid,

wondering dully what new misery was about to befall him. He had begun to look for nothing else in life, despite his brief period of hopefulness. Presently the barrel slid along its rest, and a tall man, picturesquely clad in a coloured cap of red, a loose jacket, embroidered vest, and crimson sash, with breeches tucked into long boots of soft, untanned leather, made his appearance. He carried his weapon carelessly, and had the air of one who has been alarmed, but is reassured.

Carlo Massoni—for it was he—had need of some caution in Corsica. His family had been engaged for years in more than one vendetta, and he never knew when a bullet might plunge into his back or flick out his brains. Such uncertain knowledge is an excellent preventive against sluggish habits and day-dreaming. Massoni was always very wide-awake when breathing his native air. Thus, on hearing someone approaching, he had hastily concealed himself, but he quickly saw that the stranger was harmless enough. Though satisfied on this point, he was sufficiently surprised at his appearance, and no wonder. Neil's coloured shirt and loose sailor's breeches had both shrunk, the latter so much that his legs were bare half-way to the knees; he wore shoes of list, and carried his provender in a knotted kerchief.

Massoni in all his experience of Corsica had seen nothing quite like this tall, gaunt man. He spoke rapidly to him in the patois of the island, but Neil still stood with his arms raised above his head, as if invoking a blessing on the man who had made him assume so uncomfortable and undignified a position. Massoni, however, relieved him from it by repeating himself in broken English. He was testing the stranger's nationality. He himself had from various reasons been greatly delayed on his journey south.

France was in a restless state, and every gendarme suspected a conspirator of some sort in every traveller he met. Massoni had been questioned and cross-

questioned till he hit upon the expedient of questioning his questioners as though he were a commissary of police, and this bold move, together with his size and scowling face, secured him from further annoyance. But so much time was wasted through this and other causes that he missed a vessel sailing for Ajaccio, which, being nearer his home on the slopes of Monte Padro, was his original destination. He had eventually to be content with a passage to Bastia, and having left his baggage there, had passed the night with a relative at the sea-coast village of Erbalunga. Now he was returning to take the steep hill-road which led from Bastia to the west.

'You are an Englishman?' he said in French.

'You are mistaken, sir,' answered Neil, who was not impressed in favour of this swarthy-complexioned inquisitor.

'Take care,' said the latter, tapping the barrel of his musket; 'do not trifle with me.'

'I am not likely to,' answered Neil, 'while you hold the cards.'

He did not turn the phrase properly. Massoni showed his white teeth, which contrasted with the jet-black of his tiny pointed moustache.

'What is your name?' he asked.

'I cannot see how that concerns you,' said Neil coldly. 'I have the honour to wish you good-morning.'

'Not so fast, my friend,' laughed Massoni. 'I am responsible for strangers here. We will retrace our steps a little, so face about.'

He emphasized his words by thrusting the muzzle of his musket into the small of Neil's back, and there was nothing for it but to obey. Presently they came upon the wrecked boat.

'Sapristi!' said Massoni in the Italian fashion, 'Elbese! There is something strange here.'

He seemed to meditate a moment, and then his manner changed. He became affable and polite,

'I have made a mistake,' he said; 'your pardon, sir. I am the Signor Massoni, of Olima, a place two days' journey hence amongst the mountains. I perceive you have been unfortunate, and shall be pleased if you will accept my hospitality. This is a barren coast as far as people are concerned, and the villages are dirty.'

There he lied, for Bastia was but a few miles to the south.

Neil did not understand his change of front, but he was tired and helpless. He did not much care what became of him, and even if he refused the man might insist.

'I return your confidence,' he answered. 'My name is Noël Deschamps. True, I am not wholly French, but neither am I in any sense English, I thank God!'

Massoni stared at him. Again he was at fault. He had been certain this was one of the race he hated. Still he determined that he should accompany him. He knew the Emperor was in exile on the island, which he could see rising black and precipitous on the horizon from the great glittering plain of the Mediterranean. This stranger was from Elba, there might be something to be made of him, information to be obtained which might yet prove useful. Bruslart, the Governor of Corsica, was unscrupulous, and Massoni shrewdly guessed that there would soon be plots on foot. This Noël Deschamps might mean money and perhaps power, might further his schemes for revenge, therefore he resolved not to lose sight of him.

Neil knew nothing of Corsica, its geography, or the habits of its people. He had read of the patriot Paoli, he had heard vaguely of brigandage and the vendetta, but he was practically in a new world. With as good a grace as he could muster he accepted Massoni's offer, and together they set out.

The two days which followed filled him with

wonder. The scenery would have entranced him had he not been worrying as to the future, and trying to fathom his companion.

Following a track winding upwards through groves of olive and walnut trees, they climbed the steep slope till they were out upon a bare hillside—bare, that is, except for occasional clumps of the wild cherry, and patches of sweet-smelling mountain flowers. They crowned the ridge, and beyond stretched a prospect like a mighty relief-map, with another glimpse of smiling sunlit sea to the north. Eventually they reached the road leading to the little town of St. Florent on the gulf of that name.

Neil found Massoni taciturn and uncommunicative, but he had no desire to talk. He was too busy noting everything—the brown-skinned, drowsy men, the bare-footed women and children, the quaint houses of stone and sun-dried clay. But after they had eaten, Massoni provided him with a pair of coarse boots and a hat of straw, apologizing for the appearance of both, and they left the beaten track.

Their way led through valleys full of the sound of running water and the song of birds, over mountain spurs, clothed to the summit by clustering ilex-trees or chestnut forests, and seamed by merry, splashing cascades. They camped in the open, and a herd of half-wild goats came and browsed about them, and then wandered off, as clear and faint came a plaintive piping summoning them to the milking. The sun was brilliant all day long, the soft breezes laden with the scent of wood violets and the inevitable macchie, and now and then with the resinous smell wafted from sombre fir-trees on the higher slopes.

Neil Darroch felt dazed and stupefied. After all the misery he had endured this seemed to him a heaven upon earth. He was content at last to gaze about him, and eat and drink, his mind well-nigh a blank, his senses intoxicated.

On they marched, by paths known to few; and

they rapidly drew near a wilder district, the nome of Massoni; for Olima was a village of brigands.

Upwards they toiled till they were amongst gorges and precipices, till above gleamed the winter's snow, capping vast mountain flanks, shaggy with fir forests, or barren, like Neil's own hills. Ermine-tipped cones stood out against the blue sky away to the south, where lay Monte Cinto and Monte Rotondo, giants amongst giants. In front towered Monte Padro, and in a nook on its eastern side they came upon Olima.

It was a dirty village, small and straggling, but Massoni lived apart in a fair-sized house, with a flat roof and a covered veranda, a house perched on a tiny, vine-clad peak, which caught all the sunlight that played upon this gloomy, rock-girt spot.

Now that Neil Darroch saw the place to which Massoni had brought him, his suspicions were again aroused. He felt glad he had a knife in his possession when a score of wild-looking men appeared and greeted his companion with cries of welcome. They were all armed, and he fancied they did not regard him favourably. Massoni, however, said a few words to them, and passed on.

'Any one of these fellows would willingly die for me,' he told Neil, who could not help thinking their devotion might be expended on a worthier object.

Still, his host was gracious enough, though very taciturn. He did not even put any further questions, but Neil could see that he was absorbed in his own thoughts, which seemed to afford him infinite satisfaction. Massoni, indeed, was gloating over his long-delayed revenge.

Neil slept well and soundly, despite his new surroundings, for the long march had wearied him. In the morning he found a suit of clothes laid out for him, and a boy came, who indicated by signs that he would attend to his wishes. He saw nothing of Massoni till the evening, and spent the day in the house,

watching, from its windows, which had shutters but no glass, the magnificent panorama of crag and forest spread out below him.

Massoni hardly spoke at the evening meal of goat's flesh and dried fruit, save to compliment him on his appetite, and to inquire politely if he lacked anything. For all that, Neil could not overcome a certain dislike to him, which he strove to banish, but in vain. Now that his body was rested, his mind became more active, and he lay awake on his hard bed, which was too short for him, and reviewed the situation. Had any man, he asked himself, undergone such a series of remarkable changes in such a time? 'Adventures are to the adventurous,' they say, but they had crowded on him unsought.

As he tossed to and fro, he suddenly became aware of a repeated tapping on the shutters. He imagined that a lizard was running up and down them, or that the light breeze was playing with a loose spar. But no; the noise continued, and grew in intensity. Someone upon the veranda was making him a signal.

He rose, slipped on some clothes, and, with the clasp-knife open in his hand, stealthily crossed to the window and looked out. He could see through the slits a dark figure, and as he stood and watched it the tapping ceased.

'Open! For God's sake open!' said a low voice in French.

Neil experienced a feeling of relief. It was a woman who spoke to him. Wondering what was about to happen, he undid the fastenings, still keeping his weapon ready in case of need. It was one of those lovely nights which come but rarely in his own land. A gorgeous moon sailed high in a vault which was blue-black in colour, and studded with innumerable stars, and a silver light made all well-nigh as plain as in the daytime.

A form, shrouded in some kind of drapery, slipped into the room and stood before him.

'What do you want?' he asked in a tone which had a warning in it.

'I want a brave man,' was the answer, and with that the woman, by a quick motion, bared her face, a face so full of woe, of deep suffering, that Neil's pity was aroused.

He had been growing selfish, and no wonder, perhaps. It was well for him to find there were others who had known misery and shame.

'God knows,' he said solemnly, 'if you have come to the right place. I was once brave enough, but now——'

'You must be—you are an Englishman!' she said in a quick, breathless whisper.

He felt as if he had been stung.

'I am not,' he said harshly.

The woman gave a faint cry of dismay which touched him.

'Still, I may aid you,' he said.

'Then you are French?'

He did not answer.

'It is no matter,' she whispered hastily; 'your face is good and strong; and besides, you yourself are in danger.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes, though I thought it was because you were English, for Carlo hates them; but he has brought you here for evil, be sure of that.'

'He has been kindness itself.'

'Ah! you do not know him; but I have no time to say much. Listen, and do not refuse me; it is not for myself I ask,' she pleaded.

It had once been a fair face which was now lifted entreatingly to his, a face crowned by soft brown hair, and lighted by a pair of faded eyes, which long ago had been full of beauty, a face both sensitive and refined, but worn and weary.

'I will listen,' he said gently.

'Then learn first who I am. Years since, when I

was but a girl, Carlo Massoni would have made me his wife, but I would have none of him, though he fancied I was not indifferent. Then, as ever, he was blinded by conceit, headstrong, and vicious. There was to me but one on earth to whom I would have given myself, and he, alas!—he did not care. In those days he had no thought for women.'

She paused, trying vainly to conceal her agitation.

'And this man, who was he?' asked Neil with a faint trace of his old legal bearing.

'He was—how am I to own it to a stranger? He was the man who is now the Emperor of the French.'

'Napoleon!'

'Hush! you will be heard. Yes, Napoleon Buonaparte of Ajaccio, now the greatest of the great.'

Neil noted the proud ring in her voice. He had been on the point of telling her how Napoleon had fallen. Now he refrained.

'Well?' he asked, for she stood as if in a reverie, a wan smile upon her pale lips.

'Ah! yes. When Massoni found I would not be his wife, he vowed that I should be no other's, and one night he and his brothers carried me off to the mountains. You can guess the rest, monsieur.'

Neil bowed. He was strangely moved.

'But your friends?' he asked.

'They tried to rescue me, but everyone, my father, my two brothers, my cousins, all, all were shot, one after the other. I have now no friends, monsieur—in all the wide world not one to help.'

'Your pardon,' said Neil; 'I am ready.'

She gave a sob of joy.

'Ah! I knew you were a good man!' she cried. 'And we will save him yet!'

'Him?'

'Yes; listen again. It will not be for long. Massoni, five years ago, sent here a man who has been held a prisoner ever since, who has been tortured, who is kept in a miserable hole upon the side of a

precipice, but who is brave—braver than any I have heard of. If you could hear him singing cheerily in spite of his troubles! I have wept for him often.'

'Who is he?' asked Neil, now full of interest.

'He is a servant of the Emperor,' she answered, 'who would be faithful to the death, and it is from death that he must be saved. In two days Massoni is to kill him—kill, no, butcher him! He is but waiting till his brother, cruel as himself, comes from Bonifacio. I have tried before now to help him, but'—her voice trembled—'I have not the courage. I could beat myself for my cowardice, but I am afraid of the sentinel who guards the edge of the cliff night and day. Heaven help me! I was not always a coward, but——' she began to weep softly.

'My God!' said Neil to himself in English. 'May I perish like a dog if I do not thwart this Massoni!'

Not for a moment did he doubt the woman.

'Quick!' he said. 'Tell me what is to be done.'

'All is ready,' she answered. 'It has long been ready, but it will be best to wait for daylight.'

She snatched at his hand, and kissed it passionately.

He drew it back quietly, and somehow took the lead.

'Then as soon as it is dawn you will meet me—where?'

'On the ground below where we stand.'

'Good. Have you a knife?'

'I will bring a dagger with a cutting edge, a strong rope, and all that is needed. It will be necessary, perhaps, to kill the guard,' she said fearfully.

'If necessary,' replied Neil grimly, 'he shall be killed.'

'At dawn, then; and the good God thank you, for I cannot.'

'At dawn be it,' said Neil Darroch.

CHAPTER II.

THE GASCON

A MAN stood leaning on his gun, watching the birth of a new day, gazing with dull eyes at the glorious spectacle of dawn amongst the mountains, the play of colours in the eastern sky, the long shafts of golden light streaming from north to south, tinging the rising mists till the vapours glistened with rainbow hues, like shimmering opals, striking on peak and pinnacle and jet-black forest, and on the green carpeting of the silent valleys. It moved him not one whit. He had seen it too often to find it wonderful; his was not the eye which appreciates the beautiful. He was sleepy with his long vigil, though he had not troubled to keep awake all night. Why should he? It was folly to require it of him, when the prisoner had been safe for five long years. How could one escape in such a place? Who would even try to rescue him? The man grunted. He would not yet be relieved for six mortal hours, and he was hungry. Suddenly, without warning, a great bony hand fastened on his mouth, his head was wrenched backwards, and a knee was driven into the small of his back. As he staggered and fell, his gun was snatched from him. Then, before he quite knew what had happened, he found himself lying on his back, gagged and bound.

'So far, so good,' said Neil Darroch; 'he will not trouble us further. And now, where is the place?'

'This way,' said his companion, and led him forward a few paces to where a thick-stemmed tree grew upon a cliff edge.

Neil looked, and was astonished. Below him was a huge rift—a gorge, whose sides, clad with verdure far below, rose upwards from the tree-belt five hundred feet, barren and precipitous. At its base he could trace the thread of silver that marked the

water-course which had through countless ages cut this cañon in the mountain's flank. It made him giddy to look into its depths, where as a mere speck he could see some great bird sailing slowly along in mid-air.

'Look,' said the woman; 'do you see that ledge straight below, some twenty feet down? It is upon it that the cave opens in which he is. Ah, listen! Did I not tell you so?'

There floated up to him the sound of a man's voice singing. Neil recognised the air. It was the 'Marseillaise.'

'Is he not brave?' said the woman. 'At all hours I have heard him, and that is his favourite.'

'Yes,' said Neil slowly, and there was a moisture in his eyes; 'he is worth the saving.'

They returned to where they had laid down the rope and their provisions before securing the sentinel.

'They have a ladder made of rope and wood,' said the woman, 'but this is the best I could get. I stole it three years ago, yet it is good and strong.'

'I cannot see,' said Neil, 'how they could get him up without danger to themselves, if he has any sense.'

'You forget,' she said, 'they have pistols; they could shoot him from the ladder. But see, I have written a note saying we are friends, and here is a cord by which to lower it. We need a small stone to weight it.'

'You are thoughtful,' said Neil.

'I have had plenty of time to think,' answered the woman sadly.

A man who was half choking, whose eyes were glaring at them in rage, was finding time pass all too quickly from one point of view, and all too slowly from another. He was working desperately at his lashings.

Neil Darroch lay down, and gave a low whistle. The singing ceased abruptly. He whistled again,

and a man appeared on the little platform of rock. The letter was lowered, and they saw him receive it safely and read its contents. He looked up, and began making signs. He held a hand aloft and shook it vigorously, as if in pain. He pointed to his palm.

'He is hurt,' said Neil, 'and cannot hold on to the rope.'

'What are we to do?' cried the woman in despair.

'There is but one thing for it,' he answered, 'if the rope is long enough, and that is to cut off a portion. I shall descend, fasten him to myself—he does not look heavy—and bring him up.'

'But can you? will you be able?'

'I can but try,' he said; 'and,' he added to himself, 'it would seem I have not served on the *Rattler* for nothing.'

They made the rope fast round the tree. It reached the ledge easily, and there was plenty to spare.

Neil pulled it up again, knotted it in several places, again made it fast, tested it, and saw there was nothing which could chafe it.

'Now,' he said, 'keep a good watch and a good heart.'

The woman did not reply, she was too excited to speak.

Neil lowered himself carefully over the cliff, and descended slowly. As he did so he noticed that the cliff face was practically a smooth wall, affording absolutely no footing. It was a fiendish idea to imprison anyone in such a spot. Neil's only wonder was that the man below him had not long since hurled himself into space, and found relief in death. He did not know Jules Gironde.

As he said to himself, his experience on the frigate now stood him in good stead. He took care not to look down into the abyss below him, but kept his eyes fixed on the rock face past which he slipped. The

man below kept the rope as taut as he could. Neil found the descent easier than he anticipated.

Presently a hand caught him by the leg, and a moment later he was upon the ledge, and before him stood the strangest figure of a man he had ever seen. He was short and thickly-built, and clad in rags. He was bareheaded, and his skin showed through great rents in his boots. He looked more like a scarecrow than anything else, and stood peering at Neil out of half-closed eyes like a sleepy chicken wakened in the hen-roost.

As Neil returned his scrutiny with interest, he noticed that there was something very singular about him. For a moment he could not discern the cause; then, with a start, he perceived that the man had no ears. The outline of his head was unbroken. It was marked by a dark red scar on either side, and in the centre of each was an oval hole, surrounded by pouting skin, like the featherless auricle of a bird. A straggling, untidy beard bedecked his cheeks and chin, but his scalp was nearly bald, though what hair there was had a fluffy appearance, and was gray in colour. It resembled the fine fur of a young rabbit. His face was brown as a berry, and was the face of a man who had once been fat. There was something pitiful in its evident capacity for filling out, in its empty lurks of skin and furrowed leanness. For all that he had not the alert look of a hungry animal, but rather the dull, heavy expression of one who had fasted long and slept little. His eyes were weak and reddened at the lid-margins, but Neil could see the excitement in them. Jules Gironde seemed suddenly to rouse himself. He clapped his heels together and bowed.

Neil nodded to him. It was no time for ceremony. He could see behind the man an opening in the cliff about four feet in height. The ledge was narrow, and ended abruptly on either side; he did not feel inclined to look behind him.

'Your hand is hurt?' said Neil in French.

'But yes,' said Jules Gironde in a shaky voice; and then, to Neil's astonishment, he came rapidly to the salute. 'Courage, my friend, courage for the Emperor!' he exclaimed.

Neil began to think that his sufferings had turned his brain. He was about to explain the plan of rescue when from above a scream rang out, repeated twice, and, before he could realize what was happening, the body of a woman flashed past him and vanished from his sight. There was dead silence for fully a minute, and then came a faint sound, as of the distant crackling of twigs, and again silence. At the same moment the rope began to glide upwards. He made a wild snatch at it but was too late, and would have followed the hapless woman to destruction had not Gironde seized him by the arm. Overcome with horror, Neil staggered towards the cave, covering his face with his hands.

Gironde stepped to the edge and quietly looked over. There was nothing to be seen but that with which he was only too familiar.

'God rest her soul!' said Jules Gironde.

Presently Neil became conscious of a slap upon the shoulder.

'Follow me,' said a voice, and Gironde led the way into the grotto.

Neil, by a great effort, mastered his emotion. 'Her troubles are at an end,' he told himself. His own seemed to have begun afresh.

'What are we to do now?' he asked. 'The rope is gone, the food is gone, and presently that villain above, who must have somehow got free, will summon the others.'

'And the others will not find us, I hope,' answered Jules Gironde.

'What do you mean?' cried Neil, who had been taking in the features of the place in which he now found himself.

It was a mere hole in the limestone, with irregular sides, and a roof which at its inner end sloped nearly to the floor, and from which water dripped in parts. There was no vestige of a bed, no vestige of anything which might give such a prison even the semblance of comfort.

'Great heavens!' said Neil. 'Have you lived here five years?'

'For nearly five years, monsieur,' said the little man. 'Is it not a palace?' He waved his hand abroad in a manner which reminded Neil of Charles Deschamps. 'I would do you the honours,' he added quaintly, 'but our time is strictly limited. We must leave at once, and fortunately no packing up is required. May I inquire the name of my travelling companion?'

'My name,' said Neil, 'is Deschamps—Noël Deschamps; but I fail to catch your meaning. If there is any passage from this hole—and I confess I see none—why have you remained?'

'A question, sir, which does you credit; but look here!' He was trembling with excitement, and dragged Neil to the end of the cave. A light began to dawn upon the latter.

What he saw was a huge rounded block of black stone, with a whitish crusting upon it here and there. Encircling it was a deep groove, which looked as if it had been chiselled.

'Behold the work of four years—work I thought was in vain until ten minutes ago,' said Jules Gironde with an air of triumph.

'I do not understand,' said Neil Darroch.

'That is natural enough, but permit me to explain in a few words. Ah, my friend, if you knew the joy of again speaking to a human being! but there will be time to chatter like a jay, please God. Observe, then, that this rock is different from the rest. It did not look so when first I came to be here, for it was coated with a deposit of lime—you see how the water

trickles over it? I chipped off some by chance, and more for amusement.' He laughed softly. 'It has been great fun,' he said, with a droll wag of his head. 'Here are my tools'; he picked up a bone and a pointed piece of rock. 'I worked till I found the stone was set in a ring of hard clay. Then I understood. Said I to myself, "Courage, Jules Gironde, this is man's doing; there is a passage beyond." I am from Gascony,' he added, 'and we Gascons are not easily beaten, Monsieur Deschamps.' He laid emphasis on the name. It was as if he doubted Neil's word, but the latter was too interested to notice this fact. 'Is it any wonder my fingers are rough and torn? At times I grew frenzied and tore at it with my nails. A year ago I had picked away as much as I could pick. Behold the result!'

He stooped, and pressed his shoulder against the stone near its base. Its upper part swung outwards towards Neil, but its movement was very slight.

'You see,' said Jules Gironde, 'I have not the strength. It is balanced in some way. I think a bar of iron passes through its centre, and is fixed in the wall on either side; but that does not matter now. Together we shall succeed.'

'But what is beyond?'

'Ta, ta, ta!' said the little man testily; 'let us go and see. To stay here means death.'

'By all means,' said Neil coldly, 'let us explore it.'

Jules Gironde touched his arm.

'Do not be offended, my friend,' he said. 'I am perhaps a little elated; but remember I thought I was as near liberty a year ago. I wept when I found I was not strong enough to move it, but I shall not weep again. If I was rude I ask your pardon.'

Neil had the grace to feel ashamed of his touchiness.

'The fault is mine,' said he, and gripped the hand which the impulsive Gascon proffered him.

'Mon Dieu!' said the latter, 'your clasp is like a vice, but all the better. Catch the upper edge when I press again. Are you ready? Then, ehoe, ehoe!'

'Parbleu!' said Gironde, panting, 'but it is stiff. Again, my friend; there is need of haste.'

Once more they struggled with the block, and Neil summoned all his energies to the work in hand. It creaked, stuck fast, and then slowly yielded to the strain.

As the lower half was raised Gironde crept through beneath it. He shifted his grasp, and then, its fastenings being thoroughly loosened, managed to retain it in its new position till Neil joined him.

Keeping the stone raised, they could see that, as Gironde had surmised, a tunnel ran away from it, but owing to the gloom, it was impossible to make out its nature.

'At last!' said Gironde; 'God is very good,' and with that they let the block sink heavily back into its place.

They were in total darkness. Before leaving his prison the Gascon had taken the precaution of carrying through with him the fruit of his labours, in other words, the pieces of clay which he had picked out so laboriously; now he managed to thrust them into the groove, explaining that it would make things more difficult for their pursuers, and then they began to grope their way along the passage, proceeding with the greatest care and in utter silence, save when Gironde, who led the way, uttered a word of caution.

The air was damp and smelt foul, the roof low, the floor uneven. When they stood still they could hear the steady drip of water-drops. As they advanced they became conscious that they were gradually ascending. They were proceeding up a gentle slope.

'This, also,' said Gironde at length, 'is the work of man.'

Neil did not answer. He was thinking of the

wretched woman, and thinking also that the flint and steel had gone with her, otherwise their progress would have been easier.

Suddenly Gironde uttered a low cry of surprise. He had come upon a flight of rude stairs cut in the solid rock. He halted and waited till Neil joined him.

'Have you the dagger ready?' he asked; 'we may have need of it soon.'

'Here it is, and here is a knife which you had better take.'

'Good,' said Gironde, 'and now for liberty!'

They mounted steadily, and then the Gascon, whose hands were stretched out before him, came again to a stop. The stair had ended; his knuckles were rapping lightly upon wood.

He hurriedly explained the situation.

'What are we to do now?' asked Neil. 'If we stay here long enough we shall be killed like rats in a hole.'

'Pouf!' said Jules Gironde, 'I would give a third ear if I had one to meet them here, provided they had not pistols or guns; but your true dog of a Corsican is never without his musket; however, I have been in many a worse fix than this. Courage, my friend!'

All the time he was feeling the woodwork in front of him, and Neil, standing below, heard him give a grunt of satisfaction.

'Your dagger,' said the Gascon. 'I have found a spring, but be ready for a rush—God knows where we are.'

There came a gentle hammering, then a click, and the blackness before them vanished as if by magic. They stood staring into an empty room, destitute of furniture.

'Parbleu!' said Jules Gironde, 'a sliding panel, as I thought; but I would wager no one here knows of its existence. This house must be very old. En avant!'

They stepped out, and while his companion turned his attention to the secret door, which he found to be covered with whitewash, like the walls of the room, and absolutely indistinguishable from the inside, Neil crossed to a small window and looked out.

It was his turn to be surprised, and not only surprised but astounded. The scene which now greeted him was the same with which he had become acquainted during the last two days.

He was once more in the Villa Olima, the stronghold of Carlo Massoni.

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE.

SCARCELY had he realized this important and astonishing fact when he also became aware that they were in one of the upper rooms, and like a flash he remembered having noticed, on his first approach, that a portion of the house at the back seemed built into the solid rock. The peak, upon part of which it stood, shot up behind it to the level of its roof in the form of a cock's comb. Had Neil not been so occupied with the terrible events of the past, he might have guessed whither the rock stair led.

As it was, he beckoned to Gironde, whose efforts to replace the panel were in vain. If an inner spring did exist, he could not find it. The Gascon, as he crossed the floor, looked a different being from the lethargic creature who had greeted him upon the ledge. He had wakened up with a vengeance. His movements were full of life and energy. He had a huge grin upon his lean, starved face.

'Do you know where we are?' whispered Neil.

'To be sure,' was the answer. 'It is a case of from frying-pan to fire.'

'It seems to afford you much pleasure.'

'Ha! ha!' said the little man softly. 'You may yet see the meaning of my words. Hush!' he added quickly.

From immediately below them came the sound of an angry voice, faint but unmistakable.

In a moment Gironde darted to the window, peered from it for a second, and then thrust out his head. Withdrawing it, he stood back and surveyed the opening.

'Superb!' said he. 'It is large enough. I shall trouble you for the rope you have tied round your middle, monsieur.'

Neil had forgotten all about it. It was the piece with which he had intended to lash Gironde to himself. Certainly this blind-looking mortal had all his wits about him.

As he unwound the coils Gironde again examined the window.

'What are you up to now?' asked Neil.

'I am going to discover what is going on in the room below, that is, if the rope be long enough.' He laid it out before him. 'It will do,' he said. 'Now for a loop. Monsieur, may I ask you to make one? I perceive you have been a sailor, and my hands are too painful.'

Neil was by this time so amazed that he asked no more questions.

'Allow me to mount on your back,' said Gironde. 'I thank you. You are tall, even for an Englishman.'

Neil's start would have shaken him off had he not been already half-way through the aperture.

'There is no one about,' said he. 'Be good enough to slip the noose round my right foot. Thank you. Do you see a hook on the wall, to which a bar has once been fastened? That will do for making fast the other end. Lower away, monsieur.'

Neil now perceived his object. He was about to

descend head first, so that he might bring his eyes on a level with a window directly below, and yet remain concealed from those within. Neil's feelings at this extraordinary escapade were a mixture of wonder, horror and suspense.

They were exactly those of Jules Gironde himself, who was staring upside down at a scene in which he knew both actors—the last act of a tragedy.

Carlo Massoni had been roused from sleep by the arrival of the sentinel whose duty it was to guard the captive. He was a powerful fellow, and had twice got clear of the prison in Ajaccio, so that he knew a trick or two with regard to the freeing of wrists and the wriggling out of lashings. Once rid of his bonds, he had stealthily crept upon the woman who lay intently watching the men on the ledge beneath her.

Her senses were, however, acute. She heard his approach, turned her head, and read, as she thought, murder in his face. Forgetting everything in her wild terror, she sprang up, and as he made a rush towards her, stepped backwards, overbalanced, and went headlong into the gorge, crashing through the tree belt five hundred feet below, and meeting what may have been an easy death.

Vezzani, the sentinel, did not turn a hair; he coolly dragged up the rope, and then lay down to wait. His object was to shoot the man who had gagged him. His delay was that man's salvation, and the reason why Jules Gironde was a witness to his death; for what he heard were these words:

'You are a fool, Vezzani, a blind bat, a dog without sense; you are a son of the mountains, and yet do not know that the surest way to force a person over a cliff is to rush towards him. You had no intention of killing her, you say, Vezzani. I am grieved, my friend, that my intentions regarding you are the very opposite. You will never learn, therefore——'

And what Gironde saw was a dagger sheathed to

the hilt in a man's chest and the exit of Carlo Massoni from a room on the floor of which lay a corpse.

Such was the news he gave Neil Darroch when he returned, climbing in backwards with no little difficulty.

'Behold my wisdom!' he panted. 'Had we gone out by the door ten chances to one we would have been discovered; but men in my trade learn a thing or two—oh yes, just a leetle,' he added in English, thrusting his tongue into his cheek. 'Now,' he went on, 'the house will be clear in a minute. Listen!'

There came the sound of a sheep-horn echoing amongst the hills.

'Massoni can know nothing of this'—he jerked his thumb toward the passage—'and they are off upon a wild-goose chase. We will wait here for five minutes, then go downstairs.'

'The boy will be there,' said Neil.

'Ha! do you know the place?'

'I slept in it last night.'

'The devil you did! It is more than anyone will do this night. Do you now take my meaning as to the fire?'

'But,' said Neil, 'if we burn the house, it will summon them back.'

'Maybe, my friend, but our start will be a short one in any case, and no man shall treat Jules Gironde like a bear for five years, and spoil his beauty, and torture him by cold—such cold as blinds—and yet go unscathed; he will burn later, his house will burn now. Are you with me in this matter?'

'I am,' replied Neil Darroch.

They opened the door, descended a flight of wooden stairs, and Gironde, after pausing a moment, gently opened another door, and pointed with his finger. Neil Darroch, looking past him, saw a figure lying huddled on the floor.

'Does anything strike you?' whispered Gironde.

'Yes,' answered Neil. 'Massoni may not object to having his handiwork concealed.'

'Precisely,' replied the Gascon. 'I ask your pardon for having thought you a fool, though a brave man.'

'I lay claim to be neither,' said Neil, with a touch of his old self. 'I am an advocate, and your question was a legal one.'

'Superb!' said Jules Gironde. 'We shall be excellent company. Now let us seek the kitchen.'

They found it, and they found the boy, who became a mere inert mass in the inside of two minutes, for the Gascon had been too wise to leave the rope behind. The house was deserted.

A few minutes sufficed to start a conflagration; then, removing their prisoner to a safe place, they hurriedly collected a few provisions. They had no time to look for arms, although it was probable that every man had left the village.

'Tell your master,' said Gironde, stooping over the boy, 'that I, Jules Gironde of Gascony, shall yet send him to his own place.' Then, rising, he came solemnly to the salute. 'For the Emperor!' said he; and with Neil Darroch at his side stole down the slope to the nearest cover.

What followed was to be remembered by Neil all his life, for no man can be hunted well-nigh to the death and forget it.

It was not long before they discovered that they were pursued, were indeed being tracked by some of the mongrel dogs which prowl about the garbage heaps in every village of Corsica. Their only satisfaction, as they hurried along a sparsely-wooded mountain-side, was to see flames shooting up behind them. The Villa Olima, despite its stone, was blazing briskly. They stood a moment to watch it.

'Superb!' exclaimed Gironde. 'Not only will Massoni probably keep his men at the cliff till Vezzani is well charred, but think of the faces of

those who have exploited the passage. There will be no room for them to walk into. I would give a third ear, if I had one, to see them.'

He chuckled with glee, and his appearance was so comical that Neil burst into a hearty laugh. He was beginning to enjoy, and therefore to like, this ragged little scarecrow with whom his fortunes had become linked.

'En avant!' cried the Gascon, and on they ran till away in the distance they could hear the barking of the village curs.

Gironde seemed full of resource. He would return and double back on his tracks. He would make Neil run one way, and run another himself. At last they reached a steep moss-lined watercourse, shaded by giant ferns and graceful maidenhair, from under which crawled a long black snake, terrified by their approach. At sight of it, Neil thanked his stars that his clothes, although they were beginning to suffer, were a very efficient covering compared with his companion's fluttering garments. Gironde, however, laughed at him.

'If that were all the danger, we would do,' he said; 'but we should baffle the dogs here.'

Events proved he was right.

They crawled down the bed of the stream, and the Gascon suffered torment from his bruised hands as he clung to roots and boulders and tufts of long coarse grass.

Eventually they quitted the rivulet where it reached a tiny green vale, studded with the choicest blossoms, where countless bees were on the wing, and where gorgeous butterflies flitted lazily past. They would fain have rested, but it was not to be.

All day they travelled amongst enchanting scenes, and at night reached a bare spot high up upon a mountain spur. It was cold, but sheltered from the wind, and both were so exhausted they could go no further.

'To-morrow,' said Gironde, 'we will shape a course. We must find a village, and risk a little.'

'I know nothing of the island,' answered Neil. 'Where do you propose going?'

'To me it is a matter of indifference. My duty is to find the Emperor, whose servant I have the honour to be.'

It was wonderful how his face brightened whenever he referred to Napoleon.

'Then,' said Neil, 'we must head to the east.'

'And why the east?'

'Because, of course—but why, you do not know, to be sure.'

'Know what?' cried the other, sitting up.

'Know that Napoleon is in Elba.'

'Elba!' shrieked Gironde. 'What does he there? Impossible! What mean you?'

And then Neil told him. His agitation was tremendous.

'Did I not warn him long ago?' he muttered, and Neil guessed that there were tears in his eyes.

'You?'

'Yes, I. You see in me the soldier, Jules Gironde of Gascony, who became—I speak without boast—the most trusted, the most famous, of the secret service. You marvel that the Emperor had any work for one like me. Is it not so? I see it is. But, monsieur, you are mistaken. There was a time when Jules Gironde was a man worth knowing. My duty was to capture this Carlo Massoni. I did so, but his friends caught me. The Corsican is cunning, as I should have known, for is not Napoleon of Ajaccio? There is a pretty fashion of letter-writing in these parts. Voilà!' He touched the places where his ears had been. 'No doubt many think me dead; but the Emperor is wise. He said to himself: "This is not Jules Gironde's head—his right ear, his left ear, but not his head. Therefore he lives, and has not returned. That is because he has found work to do for me. He

will come in due time, for he has never failed me." You see, monsieur, the Emperor was right.'

Neil devoutly hoped so, for he was as anxious as Gironde to be quit of Corsica.

There is no need to recount in detail all that befell them. It was a series of escapes, one very much like the other, though Massoni himself had to be careful as soon as he and his band left the district, which was more or less under his control. This alone saved the two men who had tricked him. Gironde proved himself a skilled forager. Woe betide the chicken which strayed anywhere near him. There was fruit to be had for the stealing—luscious thick-skinned oranges, juicy green figs and tiny plums. They were in an enemy's country, and Jules regarded it as an article of war.

Once, indeed, they were driven back upon Monte Rotondo, and were in danger of actual starvation, when Gironde, who had secured a musket and a supply of ammunition, managed to stalk and bring down a young moufflon, one of those long-haired mountain sheep, now rarely seen, but then fairly plentiful on the higher ranges. They hid in the lair of the boar and the wild deer and amongst the dense macchie. They found friends in the rude charcoal-burners of the great fir-forests.

Then it was that Neil told the Gascon all that he could tell him about the past five years of French history, and listened to his lamentations. The Gascon was as emotional as a woman. He wept over Moscow and the fate of the great army, he cried down bitter curses on those whom he imagined had tricked and deserted the Emperor. To hear him speak, one would have thought he could have prevented Napoleon's downfall, and beaten back the Allies from the very gates of Paris. Neil had been deeply interested in all that had passed in Europe during that stirring period. Naturally he was most conversant with Wellington's brilliant victories in the

Peninsula, and it was a new thing for him to hear the names Badajos, Albuera and Vittoria greeted by every sign of grief and dismay. To him the Gascon's extravagant sorrow appeared at first ridiculous, but as he looked at the little man's disfigured face, his tattered clothes and half-starved body, he was moved to a profound pity. He felt that his own life had been selfish and colourless compared with that of this dauntless enthusiast who never tired of recounting episodes from his own eventful existence. He had served in Egypt when Napoleon was but a general, had followed the First Consul, and as a soldier had hailed the Emperor, but being possessed of a great natural talent for acquiring languages, he had developed it on every occasion, and had exchanged the sword for the passport, the game of war for the still more dangerous game of the secret service. He had been here, there, and everywhere. His account of peril and adventure made Neil forget his own projects; his enthusiasm for his master fired even Neil Darroch's cool and calculating spirit. This maimed, tear-shedding Gascon had something noble about him. Not a single complaint as to himself passed his lips. His only grievance was that he had not been with the Emperor at his fall.

'But I shall be with him when he re-enters Paris! Jules Gironde will be there if the good God will it,' he cried. 'The fools, the blind fools, to put such a man on such an island! Pouf! he can smell the flowers of Corsica there; he can almost see France; he is but a step from Italy. Ha! ha! monsieur, he will be at the old game soon, and the Bourbon scuttling off like a chivied cat. "Jules Gironde," he will say, "it is time we were up and doing. You have been idle for five years, I for six months. It is too long, my friend; we must pay our debts, and we shall pay them together."'

Neil only smiled grimly, yet he had half resolved to accompany his queer bed-fellow to Elba, and almost

regarded himself as an adherent of the man who was eating out his mighty heart twenty miles away across the stretch of smiling, sunlit sea which separated the eastern coast of Corsica from the Tuscan island.

So friendly did they become that Neil's reserve broke down, and he confided in Jules Gironde. He told him of Geoffrey's treachery, and all the events which led up to their meeting, but not a word of Kate Ingleby passed his lips. It would have been well for him, ay, and for Gironde, had his tale been complete.

The vivacious Jules had been greatly delighted.

'Your surprising confidences are safe with me, monsieur,' said he with a ludicrous air of politeness; 'but I venture to give you some good advice.'

'Which is?'

'That you shake the dust of your cold island from your feet and come with me to serve the only man worth serving. What will the Emperor say when he sees me? "Jules Gironde," he will say, "you have returned, as I knew you would, and you have brought with you a prisoner." "Pardon, sire," I will answer, "he is something better than a prisoner." "Then, my friend, he is a faithful servant like yourself," the Emperor will reply, and tap me on the shoulder, so.' What! you smile, monsieur; you are willing?'

'Time will show,' said Neil. 'As we say in Scotland, it is a far cry to Elba.'

'A far cry, c'est vrai, but a short sail,' said Jules Gironde.

Eventually they reached the coast, and found shelter in the hollow of a dry watercourse on the steep, rugged slopes of the Montagna Serra to the north of the town of Bastia.

Gironde had grown quite fat, and with his stoutness his audacity increased. Nothing would please him but that he should steal into Bastia at night, and find out what was occurring. He returned in a state of intense excitement.

'Great news!' he cried. 'We have now,' he added

proudly, 'not only to contend with these rascals, but with the governor of Corsica himself, and all the powers that be.'

'The deuce we have!' said Neil Darroch. 'And is that a cause for jubilation?'

'It is a reason for quitting this accursed spot as soon as may be—not for our own safety only, but for that of France.'

Neil was becoming used to the little man's extravagant ideas, and only smiled.

'You smile, monsieur!' he cried; 'you well may, for it will be our lot—yes, yours and mine—to convey to the Emperor tidings of the utmost importance. This Bruslart, the governor, is a wily fox, and as ambitious as he is cunning. He has conceived the notion of capturing Napoleon, and holding him for ransom. Yes, and he might do it, for it would not be difficult; but then, he has forgotten something.'

'Indeed!' said Neil, half guessing what was coming.

'Yes, my friend, he has forgotten Jules Gironde.'

The Frenchman had spoken the truth when he mentioned the plot against Napoleon. Bruslart, an unscrupulous but daring man, was even then considering how he might best entrap the Emperor, and serve his own ends. He was not the only one to whom such a scheme commended itself. The dreaded Barbary pirates at a later period formed a similar project, which, like that of Bruslart, never came to maturity.

Gironde had certainly made the most of his opportunities. In addition to his other discoveries, he had exploited the harbour and found a boat, which from its position could be easily seized, and in which they might escape unseen if fortune favoured them. He insisted, however, that they must wait for a calm night and a suitable wind, and Neil, though consumed with impatience, saw the wisdom of such a course. He feared that fresh dangers might await him at Elba if the *Undaunted* was still lying in the roads;

but anything was better than this inaction, and he was heartily sick of coarse, ill-cooked food, his wretched clothes, and uncomfortable bed of brushwood.

There would have been much less difficulty in getting out of Corsica if Gironde had come across a boat on the beach, but, as he said :

'These Italian dogs are lazy rogues. They might have fish for the catching, but not one of them will lift an oar, and not a keel did I see between here and Bastia, though there are two villages on the shore.'

It was a good thing for them that they soon got a night fitted in every way for their adventure. A long delay must have meant discovery, as Massoni had told his story to the governor, and he was as anxious as were the bandits to lay hands on Jules Gironde, dead or alive. As it was, a bold stroke paid, as it so often does, and on a dark morning, with the wind from the south-west, the Gascon and Neil Darroch slipped warily out of the harbour of Bastia, and laid their boat's bow for Elba. Their escapade had been wonderfully free from danger. Curs had barked at them as they stole past the shingle-roofed houses in the dirty, mean-looking villages, but they had not been challenged by a soul. Neil's spirits rose as they swung along the open road, the black hillside climbing up from it on one hand, on the other the sea murmuring a lullaby far below, the soft air laden with fragrant odours from the strips of meadow, and the clustering groves and vine-terraces.

The town, with its tall buildings and narrow streets, lay for the most part to the south of the harbour, and the guard were busy with *vin ordinaire* in the Customs shed.

Neil had to repeat his swim, for Gironde with all his accomplishments could not manage a dozen strokes; and once in the boat, he muffled the oars with bits of his nether garments, severed her rope

with his knife, and pulled gently ashore. The Gascon, after bowing ironically to the dark mass with here and there a twinkling light, which was all they could see of Corsica, stepped aboard, and surely never in its history did two stranger figures round the end of the breakwater which guards the quaint and stone-girt harbour of the island's seaport.

Once again Neil Darroch saw the rosy dawn touch the long line of the Montagna Serra, and turn to gold the winter's snow on the inland peaks. Once again he watched the night shadows quit the island chain to the eastward, from Capraya, famed of old, past Elba, whose fame was in process of making, past little Pianosa, to the distant granite cone of Monte Cristo, which was yet to be the most famous of the four, thanks to a wizard's pen.

Away astern, however, there was a sight not so pleasant—a polacre clearing out from Bastia, her triangular sail a white dot against the shore. She was fully five miles to the rear, but Jules Gironde apparently had no doubts as to her intentions.

'Yonder they come,' said he. 'How many of them will go back, think you?'

'Time will show,' said Neil, who was busy changing his clothes. He had found a fisherman's outfit in a locker forward, and was glad to get rid of his torn and filthy costume.

'Ah, the philosopher speaks,' chuckled the Gascon, beaming his approval. 'Perhaps there will be no more time for some of these rascals, only eternity.'

He laughed gaily at his little joke, and patted his musket lovingly.

'There is another suit here,' said Neil. 'You had better make use of it.'

Jules Gironde shook his head.

'Is it likely that we gain the island before they reach us?' he asked.

'I think not,' said Neil, measuring with his eye the distance between the boat's bow and the lofty

cliffs ahead, and that between the boat's stern and her pursuer, whose sail was growing perceptibly larger.

'Then, why spoil a good set of clothes?' said Gironde dryly, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Neil Darroch laughed uneasily. He could not take matters with the cool nonchalance of the old soldier. His training had been entirely different, and he knew that if it came to a fight his would be the hardest task, as he could do nothing till it was a case of close quarters, which might never be.

Gironde, on the other hand, whistled a tune to himself, cleaned out his gun and reloaded, and then laid the weapon aside, speaking to it as if it had been a living thing. The boat scarcely needed any management, for the breeze was falling. Neil took his turn at steering, and the Gascon lay down in the bows.

Suddenly he gave a cry and jumped to his feet, pointing straight in front of him.

'What is it?' Neil called out.

'There, in the shadow of the land, is there not something? My sight is not what it was, but surely something moves! Yes, it is a ship. Par Dieu! we shall trick them yet!'

Neil kept the boat away a little, and then saw what was exciting his companion. A couple of leagues ahead lay the western coast of Elba, black, lofty, and precipitous, and amongst the dark shadows which stretched out from it across the water there crept a brig, a mere brown blur, stealing lazily along close in shore under easy sail. Could they but attract the attention of her crew, there might yet be a chance of safety.

The boat swished lightly through the sea, running merrily enough, but her ropes no longer twanged like taut wires, and her canvas shivered now and then. The polacre had the tail of the breeze, and they watched her till her hull showed.

Knot after knot slipped past under both keels, and Corsica loomed a mere mass of glittering peaks a score of miles away, while Elba rose steep and massive before them, and they could see the white walls of houses and mark the outline of the coast. The brig was well-nigh becalmed, and Neil headed for her, while Gironde kept up a ceaseless jabber, and now and then shouted defiantly at their pursuers.

They were still two miles from the brig when the wind failed utterly. They lowered sail; so did the polacre. Neil of his own accord settled himself at the oars, and almost at the same moment a line of silver flashed along each side of the polacre.

'They have sweeps, my friend,' cried the Gascon, and sat down very contentedly in the stern. 'This good gun,' said he, 'sends a ball one hundred yards, and I was accounted the best shot in the old Thirty-Second when in Egypt.'

Neil Darroch had no time to answer. He was exerting himself to the uttermost, and the small boat sprang forward at each stroke, the water bubbling round her bows, and streaming in curling eddies from the oar blades.

Jules Gironde cheered himself hoarse, shouted encouragement, and several times stood up and shook his fist at the long black craft which came rushing steadily upon their track, nearer and nearer, till they could see the men aboard her.

The strain was terrible. Neil's veins stood out like blue and knotted cords upon his forehead, his arms felt like steel bands about to burst asunder, he pulled like an automaton, swinging backwards and forwards like a machine. His breath came in great sobbing gasps, but he never halted, never paused.

'Pour l'Empereur!' yelled the Gascon. 'The brig has cannon, and we near her. Pull, for God's sake pull! She is French—perhaps a Bourbon,' he shouted a moment later; 'but anything is better than those devils behind. Remember, it means your ears at

least. Bravo, my friend! The Emperor shall hear of this. He will say—pouf!'

His last exclamation was in answer to a bullet from the polacre, which raised a jet of spray yards in their rear. Following it there came a hail, a summons to surrender.

Gironde's answer may not be printed. He was scarcely responsible at such a time. It was replied to by a volley of musketry, which did no harm,

'Ta, ta, ta!' said the little man impatiently; 'there is too much noise all on one side. Monsieur is too inquisitive,' he continued, taking sights at a head just beside the root of the bowsprit. There was a bang and the head vanished. 'He has learned the same lesson as did our friend the moufflon,' said Jules Gironde, and rammed another pellet down the barrel.

He looked round and faced about with a glitter in his weakened eyes. It had come to the pinch, and all his effervescence vanished.

Neil Darroch's strength was failing him. He was soaking with sweat, strained, and almost spent. Still he laboured on, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, till the boom of a heavy gun brought him to his senses. He looked dully about him. The polacre had turned tail, and was racing for dear life. Gironde was blaspheming and praying by turns, and a few hundred yards away lay a graceful brig, a cloud of blue smoke drifting from her side, and a crowd of men lining her bulwarks. Neil Darroch made a futile effort at a cheer, and collapsed into the bottom of the boat.

He had somewhat revived by the time his companion had placed them alongside the vessel which had come so opportunely to their aid. As Jules Gironde did so there was a murmur as of pity, and then a roar of laughter. The Gascon was on his legs, flourishing his ancient head-piece and bowing this way and that with the utmost gravity, as if wholly unconscious of his dilapidated breeches, his burst

shoes, and his well-ventilated jacket. A rope ladder was sent down the side, and Gironde promptly mounted, followed by Neil Darroch, whose muscles were trembling with fatigue, but he made a great effort to hold himself erect and dignified as he gained the deck.

The brig appeared to be a ship of war. Half the men aboard her were in some sort of uniform, though they looked slovenly and untidy. The Gascon, Neil noticed, was standing staring at them open-mouthed, while they, for their part, crowded round the strange pair of fugitives.

'What is this?' cried the Frenchman all at once. 'Who are you, my friends? I see here grenadiers of the guard, chasseurs, men of the artillery. What does it mean? Are you ghosts? Is this a phantom ship?'

A shout of merriment answered him.

'Fair play!' cried a voice. 'You are the visitor, Monsieur l'Épouvantail; we shall ask your name first.'

'And I am not ashamed to give it, though you seem ashamed to show your ugly face. Have you ever heard of Jules Gironde?'

'Gironde!' echoed a chorus of voices—'Gironde the spy?'

'Yes, my friends—Gironde of the secret service,' answered the Gascon, visibly swelling with pride. 'I am he!'

'But your ears, monsieur?' queried a very trim fellow in the front.

'Have been where you would not dare to show your nose,' snapped Jules Gironde, letting the butt of his musket fall heavily on the other's toes, and joining in the roar which followed.

'And this great fellow?' cried another.

'Is worth two of you, mon brave.'

Neil was fairly bewildered by the rattle of their tongues, and stood staring at the bronzed, hairy faces

about him, till a tall man came pushing through the crowd.

A great grin spread over his face as he caught sight of the two adventurers, but he swallowed it somehow.

'These men are wanted aft,' he said. 'Follow me, messieurs, if you please.'

Amidst a buzz of talk he led the way towards the quarter-deck; but no sooner was Jules Gironde free of the throng on the main-deck than he gave a cry of astonishment and stood still, pointing in front of him, his lips working, his eyes blinking, and his whole face full of a wondering delight.

'It is he—yes, it is he!' murmured the Gascon.

Neil Darroch followed his gaze. There were three men standing at the top of the stairs which led to the poop, but he had eyes only for the one in the middle, the shortest of the trio. This man, a man with very square, broad shoulders, wore also the plainest dress. He had on an odd, three-cornered cocked hat, a green coat faced with a dirty white, and buttoned very tightly across his chest. Where it fell away on either side his paunch protruded, covered by a close-fitting Kerseymere waistcoat, and his legs were cased in breeches of the same material and white cotton stockings, all with scarce a single wrinkle. There was something smooth and rounded and placid in his appearance; and as they approached nearer him, Neil saw that his face was absolutely clean shaven and very fat, but not of that unpleasant stoutness which shows itself in loose-hanging masses of adipose tissue. It was firm and smooth, the skin coarse and weather-beaten, the features clearly not so handsome as they had been. He appeared in a very good humour, and as he smiled displayed an excellent set of teeth, and, reaching up, tapped one of his companions on the shoulder, and said something to him which made him laugh immoderately. Then he put his hands behind his back and stood

erect and passive, and for the first time, as his eyes met Neil Darroch's, the latter understood what was meant by a penetrating gaze, and felt strangely uncomfortable. Apart from Gironde's exclamation, he knew instinctively that he stood in the presence of the greatest man of his age.

The chief feeling which possessed him was an intense curiosity. He could not keep his eyes off the plump figure and set face of the late Emperor of the French. This was the genius whose shadow had lain across Europe, from Connaught to the Caucasus, from Archangel to Gibraltar, Sicily, and the Archipelago, for five-and-twenty years, who had conquered in the country of the Pyramids, who had defied the Sphinx of the desert, who had tasted victory and defeat in the Holy Land itself. He was but a name in Britain—a name dreaded and hated, but a name only, thanks to a silver streak of sea.

Now Neil Darroch, who had read of him and marvelled at his deeds, and been ready more than once to carry a musket against him and his threatening hordes, saw him in the flesh, a prisoner, a petty king, a fallen star. The brig was the *Inconstant*, and Napoleon had been surveying his little island, visiting its ancient iron mines, accompanied by his faithful Bertrand and Colonel Campbell, and was now returning to his new capital. This incident was to his taste. Anything was welcome which could divert the backward current of his thoughts.

Neil Darroch was about to bow when he remembered his costume and the rôle he had assumed. He stood in a respectful attitude, waiting eagerly to hear the Emperor's voice, and watching his every movement.

As for Jules Gironde, as soon as he recovered from his surprise he became a different being. His slouch and careless lounge vanished; he held up his head, braced back his shoulders, and marched at a regulation pace, with his musket tucked into the hollow of

his shoulder. As they halted he came to the salute, and, standing thus, looked more ludicrous than ever.

Buonaparte motioned their conductor to stand aside, and a smile flickered for a moment about his lips as he surveyed the two men at a distance of a few feet. Suddenly a change came over his face. He thrust his head forward, wrinkled his brows, and stared intensely at the Gascon.

'Your name?' he asked sharply.

Gironde did not reply, but Neil saw him make a curious movement with the fingers of his left hand.

Again the ghost of a smile played about the corners of Napoleon's mouth.

'A moment,' he said quickly, as if to prevent Gironde speaking. 'Ah! now I know that face—the face of a brave man and an old servant, one who has suffered for France.'

The Gascon made no effort to hide his scars, but a great tear rolled down either cheek. He saluted again.

'For France and the Emperor,' he said.

The man on Napoleon's right, a big-boned man with a thin, fresh-coloured face and a patch of whisker in front of each ear, listened stolidly. The other, who had an honest open countenance, a large mouth, and a fine figure, slapped his thigh and nodded approvingly. Napoleon returned the salute.

'Jules Gironde,' said he, and there was a touch of sadness in his voice, 'the day is past when I might reward you as you deserve, but you have my thanks, for I know you have done your duty. Would that I could say the same of all.'

His face darkened and grew angry, but the frown passed in a moment.

'You were in Egypt?'

'Yes, sire.'

'At the Battle of Nazareth you gained your stripes?'

'Yes, sire.'

'Since then you have served me—where?'

'In Spain, Italy, Prussia, Austria, the Netherlands and England.'

'And lastly in Corsica?'

'In Corsica, sire.'

'Where you lost your ears?'

Gironde saluted.

'Never was man better served than I have been—by some—by some,' said the Emperor significantly, pressing Bertrand's arm kindly.

'And who are you?' he asked, shifting his glance to Neil.

'My name is Noël Deschamps.'

'Deschamps! Deschamps! I seem to know that name, but no matter. And what may you be, sir? It is clear you are not a fisherman: you are tall enough for a grenadier.'

'I am a lawyer by profession.'

'A lawyer! That is bad, sir, that is bad; we must find something more useful for you to do. Jules Gironde, is this long fellow a friend of yours?'

'He is a brother in arms, sire.'

'Good; we will hear your story in an hour from now, if,' he added, wheeling round and facing the British Commissary, 'that suits your convenience, monsieur.'

Colonel Campbell flushed. He merely bowed, and Napoleon, turning on his heel, walked slowly aft, while Neil Darroch and the Gascon were instantly surrounded by a mob of excited men, each more anxious than the other to show them some attention.

Neil Darroch, however, was too busy thinking of other things to trouble his head about them, and let their questions pass unanswered. He saw now why Jules Gironde had no wish to change his clothes. The man loved a scene. He was an actor in a small way. But Neil Darroch had heard his story before, and recognised that the man with whom he had been face to face, the man with the keen blue eyes and the

harsh, metallic voice, was an actor also, one of the most accomplished the world has ever seen.

Jules Gironde alone was summoned to the cabin an hour later. When he returned he plucked Neil Darroch's sleeve and beckoned him to follow. As soon as they were alone and unobserved he cut a little caper upon the planks.

'My friend,' said he, 'you may yet hold a marshal's bâton, and I—I may be a prince.'

'What do you mean?' asked Neil.

'Mark me,' said the Gascon, tapping his comrade on the chest with each word he uttered, 'the Emperor has not said a word, has not whispered a syllable, but I would wager a third ear, if I had one, that he will be in Paris before either of us are gray-headed. And then nous verrons!'

CHAPTER IV.

'VIVE L'EMPEREUR!'

JULES GIRONDE was in his element. He was in his beloved Paris; he had a glass of his favourite Rhenish at his elbow, an appreciative audience, and a great topic—the doings of his master and himself. With but few exceptions those who listened to his account of the Emperor's audacious and bloodless march on the capital were at one with him in admiration of the great stroke for liberty and power, and still more of the head which planned it and carried it to a triumphant conclusion.

On the outskirts of the little crowd seated in the café Guerraz of the Rue du Bac there was, however, one man in whom the Gascon's vivid and flattering narration roused no enthusiasm. Strange to say, he was also the only man present who could contradict or confirm Gironde's statements with authority, for he had seen all, or nearly all, the events on which

the spy dilated, and was himself included in the tale. The man was Neil Darroch. He was much changed. There was an air of listlessness about him; his face had acquired an unpleasant expression, half-cynical, half-scornful. It was the face of a man who was not at peace either with himself or the world. As a matter of fact, it was the face of a man whose ideals had been shattered, whose ambition had been thwarted, and who had even relinquished his thirst for vengeance.

Things had not gone well with him at first. Anxiety, exposure, and fatigue brought on ill-health; a low, languishing fever gripped him at Porto Ferrajo, and made an invalid of him all through the hot summer and the autumn. Had it not been for the cheery Jules he might have left his bones in Elba, uncared for, scarcely missed. But though he found a true friend in the little Gascon, he discovered that he himself had neither the tastes nor the instincts of a Frenchman. He could admire the good-nature and burning zeal of the exiled veterans; he saw much which attracted him—a gallant *esprit de corps*, a shoulder-shrugging philosophy, fine touches of true chivalry, and that careless, light-hearted courage which characterizes the French soldier who has seen service. There was a simplicity and frugality about their daily existence which appealed to him, but for all that, he felt with somewhat of dismay that their ways were not his ways.

Porto Ferrajo was vicious during the brief reign of Napoleon, and there was a levity and license which shocked the staid and somewhat strait-laced Scot. His nature was too sensitive, his upbringing had been too stern, for such pleasures to have any charm for him. It was not so much the sins in themselves as the open way in which they were committed which disgusted him. He viewed it all with a fine contempt and the irritation of a sick man. Gironde understood, and laughed at him.

'I know you, Noël, my boy, better than yourself,' he would say. 'I have been to England, and have admired—oh, very greatly!—the amusing way you cloak things; but the candle may flame even under the extinguisher. We are not ashamed, you are—there is the difference in a nutshell. I myself am a busy man, therefore moral; but it is all custom, my friend, all custom, I assure you.'

'I know nothing of England,' Neil would growl savagely; and Gironde held his tongue, knowing better than to argue with a peevish invalid and a misanthrope.

Religion was another stumbling-block in Neil Darroch's endeavour to identify himself with his mother's people. Certainly it was not much in evidence either in court or camp, with the exception of a fine respect for the Almighty which in all ages has served men more or less to their satisfaction. But Elba was Italian, and cassocked friars came and went, and shorn priests were thick as berries, and these latter Neil had from his earliest reading days regarded as emissaries of Satan. The greatest epoch in the history of France was in his opinion the gallant struggle for liberty of conscience made by the Huguenots, from some of whom he claimed descent; its foulest and darkest page the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

As has been said, he was not a specially pious man; he was like the great majority, respectable and careless; but religious history was a strong point with him, as with most of his countrymen. Roman Catholicism was the faith of France, inasmuch as it had any faith at all, and the fact did not come kindly to the man who was striving to forget the land of his birth.

As he grew stronger, his doubts increased. He had been prepared to become a hero-worshipper; but he saw Napoleon at his worst. Buonaparte was living the life of a none too virtuous country gentle-

man. His fire and energy seemed to have fled; he was often melancholy and out of humour.

Neil Darroch had detected his plausibility when first he saw him, and this had rankled. He had considered Napoleon as a general and a leader of men, and had forgotten that such a prodigy must needs have manifold sides to his character. His little trick with Gironde had disgusted Neil, who had very fine and wholly unpractical ideas as to the behaviour of persons of exalted rank and great attainments. It shocked him to find that the terror of Europe was in any sense a charlatan. Still, he had lingered on in Elba, carefully avoiding the British Commissary and the inquisitive English travellers who not infrequently honoured the fallen giant by coming to inspect him as they would a lion in a cage. Their manners and customs still further prejudiced Neil against the dominant partner.

Then came the fatal coup, and for a time Neil was enthusiastic as one dramatic incident followed another, and he saw a devotion and a magnetism unsurpassed in the annals of war and hero-worship. The effect, however, had not been lasting. Truth to tell, the man was soured and embittered. He came to look upon the sobbing soldiery as ridiculous children, on the whole affair as a gigantic farce. He could not help being moved at times, as when he witnessed the transformation at the Bridge of Laffray and the affecting scenes at Lyons and Fontainebleau; but his ardour always cooled, his excitement abated, and so now he sat and listened, half amused, half scornful, to the astonishing tale which the warm-hearted Jules Gironde was spluttering out, embellishing it by motions and gestures which were more befitting in an actor than an historian.

'I have told you,' he said, 'how Monsieur Deschamps there and myself came to be upon the brig, how we cheated these Corsican rascals and that fox Bruslart.'

'Yes, yes,' answered an old war-worn fellow, tapping impatiently with his stick; 'but what of the Emperor, friend Gironde?'

'Patience, grandfather,' laughed Jules. 'As ex-sergeant of voltigeurs, you should know the value of that virtue.'

'Tonnerre! and so I do in action, but this tongue-wagging is wearisome, and it is all about yourself. One would think no one had suffered but those of the secret service. Par Dieu! I have two fingers left, and my ribs on one side run through a great bayonet scar, five of them through a devil of a mess, while as for——'

'Thine anatomy perish with thee!' shouted a lean recruit from the Sorbonne and the hospitals.

But he paid for his words by being kicked from the room. It was not well in such a company to insult a veteran.

'For all that, it is, to say the least, a probable occurrence,' laughed a little sprig of a man in a showy hussar uniform, who kept tilting his chair back on its hind-legs and plucking at his wiry and greased moustache. 'But go on, Gironde. I shall break the head of the next chatterer.'

Thus adjured, Jules recovered his good-nature, which had been sorely taxed, and proceeded:

'The Emperor sent for me. I had the honour of an interview. What he said I am not at liberty to disclose, but he was good enough to speak highly of my services in Corsica. I came away smiling from ear to ear'—here a burst of laughter interrupted the Gascon—'from scar to scar, then, my friends, if you will have it so; and why? Not because of honeyed words and compliments—no, no, I am not a child—but I read hope in the Emperor's face. I knew he had something up his sleeve, a trump-card to play—yes, and, by God! he has played it.'

'He has! he has!' roared a dozen voices.

'I give you the toast of "The Emperor"!' shouted

Gironde for the third time that morning, and it was drunk with acclamation.

'So we came at last to that dull hole, Porto Ferrajo, where I found that Drouot was the governor. His health, my friends! he is an honest man, is Drouot, he and Bertrand. Why, bless me! we have not drunk a glass to the General. Bertrand, my friends! I give you the Count Bertrand!'

After the noise which this toast evoked had subsided the Gascon again took up the thread of his narrative.

'You ask me, gentlemen, how we lived at Porto Ferrajo. I answer, none too well. What think you of the Emperor as a land surveyor and an overseer of mines? True, there was some state ceremony observed. Madame Mère was there, the Princess Paulina paid us a visit, we had receptions and balls which were attended by whom, think you? The wives of butchers and bakers. As for pleasures, we turned a church or two into theatres, and voyaged in the brig, with the English Commissioner to see that we behaved ourselves. Ah! my friends, is it any wonder our spirits were nearly broken? Cipriani, the major-domo, has wept with me time and again.'

'And what of the ladies?' asked the gay hussar, slyly winking at the company.

'You are condemned out of your own mouth, Perrier,' retorted Gironde. 'Only I do not see how you can well break your own head, and it would not harm you much if you did. Napoleon longed for the Empress, who never came, though someone else did. As to that, my lips are sealed; but I will give you yet another toast.'

'Bravo! another toast; let us but fill our glasses, Gironde.'

'You are ready, my friends? Then drink to a true woman and a faithful friend.'

'A double toast?' asked a civilian, the only one present.

'No such luck,' laughed the irrepressible Perrier.

'No, no!' cried the Gascon; 'one and the same, and in silence, messieurs—in silence, as is fitting.'

In silence it was honoured.

'So the days wore on, and by the time Monsieur Deschamps there was on his legs I at least knew that there was something in the air, and that even before Cipriani went to Livorno to purchase furniture for the palace. But he came back with news which, if the veterans had known it, would have made them swear enough to blow Elba out of the sea. That rascally Congress at Vienna had agreed to kidnap the Emperor and imprison him on a rock in the Atlantic—a place called St. Helena. And this, mark you, after all their promises and vows. Ah! but they will pay sweetly for it. I would have given a third ear, if I had one, to have seen the rogues' faces when they heard the news from the Gulf of Juan.

'Well, my friends, there is no use dwelling on what is dark and sad. Let us thank God Napoleon's health was good—indeed, better than I have known it. I have heard that some hint that he is failing. To such I give the lie. Why, he is younger than myself, and at the most I am fifty.'

'And have been since I knew you,' murmured Perrier, nodding vigorously.

'Friend Perrier is drunk; but no matter, he has been so since I first met him,' snapped Gironde, to the great amusement of the company, who were well acquainted with the failings of both these worthies.

'I say that the Emperor is sober—I mean in good health. No sick man could study as he did, could ride and take an interest in everything he saw. He is yet the man of Marengo and Austerlitz, and by all the saints in the calendar, he will yet show it. Again I give you his health.'

'Some have need of it,' chuckled Perrier, punching a fat infantryman who sat beside him, and whose looks spoke to a doubtful liver. But none heeded

him, and he drank with the rest, Neil, for form's sake, also complying with the call.

'It was, I think, in December,' Gironde continued, 'that I noticed he was not so friendly as he had been with that dry bag of bones, the English Colonel, who, by the way, was not a bad fellow, and a Scot by birth. I have a friendly feeling for the Ecossais gentlemen.'

'And I!' 'And I also!' affirmed several.

'There was a girl of that nation,' began Perrier, but someone kicked his chair from under him and his story ended abruptly, and probably in time.

'As I was saying,' the Gascon went on, 'the Emperor, who is never double-faced, grew less intimate with the Commissioner, though it was not till February that strange visitors came and went. Till then we had Italians by the hundred—I have seen three hundred in a single day—English milords, at whom the grizzled old fire-eaters of the Guard spat and swore, and scores of others. Never was Napoleon more run after.'

'Sacré!' growled the sergeant of voltigeurs, 'in my time the running was the other way.'

'You are right, grandfather; and, please Heaven, it shall be so again. But, as I was saying, in February there came a sailor who was no sailor, and a merchant who was no merchant. They were both closeted with the Emperor, and I could guess what it was they talked about. Besides, did we not hear rumours of the watchwords and the pocket-pieces?'

'There is one,' said the recruit, who had been re-admitted, slapping a little medal down upon the table. It bore an effigy of Napoleon on one side, and on the other the words, 'He has been, and will be.'

'Just so; but, for all that, it came like a thunderclap in the end, and what a scene it was! The Colonel Campbell had gone to Florence, the cat was away, and the mice played—to some tune, my friends!

It was on the 26th of February that the order came. The English sloop-of-war was at Livorno. There was no one to hinder. And yet, though they might guess, few but myself knew what was our destination. As for me, the Emperor had pinched my arm more than once, and told me that he thought the air of Paris suited me best. As you see, he could tell when a man can keep a secret.'

Neil Darroch had difficulty in repressing a smile. During the long and weary days in Elba, and the adventurous time through which they had just passed, he had had plenty of opportunity to become acquainted with the Gascon's peculiarities, and he scarcely agreed with his last statement—at least, in the sense Gironde intended.

'If I live to be a hundred,' continued the spy, his cheeks flushed and his weak eyes brightening, 'I shall never forget that day. First the guard, the men of the line, the Polish horse, and the riff-raff, worthless Corsicans and Elbans, embarked on seven cockleshells of craft, and an hour later the Emperor went aboard the brig, with the generals and myself. Ah, my friends! it was a great day, and so simple—a mere pleasure party, as it were. The inhabitants lined the quay and cheered themselves hoarse.'

'Now, that,' said Perrier, 'might have a double meaning.'

'As you have a double vision at present. If I did not know you for a true son of the Empire, I would shoot you at twenty paces; but you grow wearisome, and do not amuse, so hold your tongue, my boy, and listen to your betters.'

'Very good, very good,' drawled Perrier. 'I could never lie like you, Jules, so have your own way.'

Gironde gave a little snort of contempt.

'Lies,' said he, 'are at times advisable, at times necessary; now I deal with facts. If any doubt me, I appeal to my friend Monsieur Deschamps.'

Neil Darroch bowed.

'I confirm all you have said with regard to these events,' he replied, with emphasis.

'There!' said the Gascon triumphantly. 'That is the word of a gentleman and an advocate, who has seen what I describe. You are satisfied, messieurs?'

'They had better be,' growled old Babbitôt, the sergeant; 'for I shall now do any head-breaking that is required.'

He thumped the table and glared at the hussar, who merely smiled affably and lifted his glass to him.

Peace being thus restored, Jules Gironde began afresh:

'As I have said, I was on the *Inconstant;* and let me tell you, it was wonderful to see the change which came over the old grenadiers. Moustaches which had drooped for months stiffened like magic; back went their shoulders, up went their heads. "Paris or death!" they shouted, and those on the other ships echoed the cry.

'As for the Emperor, he was like himself again. He went about amongst his guard and patted their cheeks and pulled their bristles. When he told them we were bound for France, they could scarcely cheer, so great was their emotion. I think that Drouot was the only dull man on board. He is faithful but timid; now he has seen his mistake. We had the shore breeze with us and crowded all sail.

'Alas! scarcely had we doubled Cape St. Andrew when the wind fell. All night it continued calm. At daybreak we had hardly advanced. There were Bourbon frigates about—I shall not call them French—and some were so afraid they would have returned.

'"Gironde," said the Emperor to me, "what is your opinion?"'

'"It is that of your Majesty,"' I affirmed.

'"You are right," he answered; "let us hold on our course."'

'To lighten the vessels the baggage was thrown

over the side. Providence was with us, and behold a breeze! Behold, also, in the afternoon, a brig-of-war! She sights us, and bears down upon us.

'We prepare for battle, but the Emperor is merciful. He sends the guard below and the brigs meet. Our captain speaks that of *le Zéphir*, who, as I am a living man, must ask after Napoleon's health. What then, think you? The Emperor takes the speaking-trumpet himself, and answers that the Emperor is extremely well.'

A shout of laughter greeted this part of Gironde's narration.

'Un, deux, trois!' shouted the recruit, and one and all clapped their approval.

'Yes,' said the Gascon, 'it was superb, my friends; and yet they say the Emperor is in ill-health! Sick men do not jest. But we were not yet out of the wood. The next day we sighted a ship, but happily she took no notice of us. We sail along merrily, and the Emperor writes a proclamation to the army, to the garrisons of the south, to the veterans, to all. It stirs us, I can tell you. It shows how France has been sold, sold by traitors to the Bourbon tyrants and to foreign hordes. It promises victory and liberty. We weep as it is read, but scarcely is it finished when there is a cry of "Land!" It is Antibes, it is France. We hail it with shouts, and on every cap is seen the tricoloured cockade. The white and amaranth powdered with bees vanishes like magic, and so does all fear.

'You may think, my friends, with what feelings I view the coast line. I think of all I have suffered, of the loss of my ears, of my blindness; my emotion chokes me; but I thank God I have lived to see this day. If these were my thoughts, what must have been the Emperor's? I watched him, and his face was calm, though his lips twitched. He stood upon the foredeck, his hand so, his hat off, and I do not think he knew anything of what was passing. He

foresaw yesterday, the scene at the Tuileries, his triumph!'

'Ay,' muttered Neil Darroch to himself, 'and perhaps that which is to come.'

He was not blinded by enthusiasm as was Jules Gironde, and he read the signs more surely. He saw there must be delay, and delay he knew meant ruin sooner or later. He had not the Gascon's faith, and it may be the wish was father to his thoughts, for a change had come over his ideas as well as over himself. He no longer regarded Buonaparte as a hero. He had been prepared to do so. He had been ready to regard him as a leader and to serve under him, even to blot out his own past and start upon a new career, which, as Gironde hinted, might prove a brilliant one. At the very outset he had been shocked by the little incident he had witnessed on board the brig. Afterwards his pride had been hurt. Although on several occasions he had come under the Emperor's notice, his presence had been ignored. He saw he was forgotten and he made no effort to attract attention. Instead, he, so to speak, recoiled upon himself. True, he had hoped that something might occur on the way to Paris which would direct notice to his abilities, but he had been disappointed. He had seen a series of events well worth the seeing, but he had been an interested spectator only. His position was curious. He was entirely dependent upon Gironde, and at this he chafed, but was unable to remedy it. He had thought more than once of severing his connection with the band of men which had in a few short weeks become an army, but he had finally resolved to wait till he had an opportunity of repaying the cheery little Gascon to whom he owed so much.

He had found a friend, and, lonely man as he was, he shrank from breaking the ties of comradeship which had grown up between them. He did not believe that this effort of Napoleon, marvellous though

it was, could eventually be crowned with success. But that was not his reason for feeling dissatisfied and restless. The Emperor had not come up to his expectations. Every now and then he saw, or thought he saw, traces of a low cunning. The proclamations he had heard sounded false. They prated of peace and liberty, and yet he knew there could be neither under such a man. He had watched him as narrowly as he could, and while he found much to admire, there had been that which repelled him. He began to see what he had so often heard stated as a fact, that the motive power of Buonaparte's every action was a boundless ambition, that he was self-centered and vainglorious. He could not deny Napoleon's wonderful personality. His Celtic blood, hot and impulsive, might have led him to fall down and worship as so many had done, but it was counteracted by the effect of a legal training, by the ideas he had imbibed from a shrewd, hard-headed set of men, and perhaps, under all, there was something else, for, as we have said, a man cannot change his country like his coat.

In his own mind he was always trying to justify his actions, which in itself pointed to something wrong. He had made a mistake, and he knew it, but he had nothing to fall back upon save a desire for revenge which time and distance had weakened. He began to look upon himself as a wanderer and homeless, as one who had renounced his birthright, and had neither a country nor a people, and he took refuge in a hopeless cynicism as unhealthy as it was miserable.

It is scarcely remarkable that, after all that had befallen him, and especially with the heredity which was unhappily his, he should have passed into such a state.

Gironde did not profess to understand him, and was secretly annoyed and distressed, but was unswerving in his friendship, and never ceased trying to make Neil as staunch a Buonapartist as himself. Neil envied him, and never more so than when he

heard the delight and gusto with which Jules related every incident of the first part of that astonishing period which has passed into history under the fitting title of 'the Hundred Days.'

CHAPTER V.

THE MARCH

'BEHOLD us at last on French soil,' said Gironde —'eleven hundred men, ready to march on Paris. Picture to yourself such an army of invasion. In all history there is none like it; but remember, with these eleven hundred was the Emperor.'

'And Jules Gironde,' murmured Perrier.

'Ay, and Jules Gironde!' thundered old Babbitôt. 'Had every citizen done his duty like our friend here, there would have been no need for any invasion, so put that in your pouch, my dandy.'

'Gently, gently!' said the Gascon. 'Perrier must have his little joke, and he is not far wrong; but, mark me, whatever is in store for France is due to us. We of the forlorn hope have made history. Think of us! We were in the south, which has always been hostile to the Emperor, where Napoleon was but a year before in danger of his life from a mad crowd of fanatics, and yet we were confident. The Emperor speaks of his star, a vanishing star some have called it, but to me it is like one of those brilliant planets which storm-clouds may obscure, but which is there all the same, and shines again more brightly than ever.'

Gironde was so pleased with his poetical simile and the applause it called forth, that he rose and bowed repeatedly, and Neil noticed he was not very steady on his feet. It is scarcely to be wondered at, considering the amount of wine he had stowed away;

but his head was clear and his speech unaffected, which was more than could be said for the fat infantryman, who, after delivering a few incoherent sentences, went sound asleep, and was promptly deposited on the floor. As he had been known to snatch forty winks with his company under fire, Gironde took his inattention with a very good grace.

'At first things looked black enough. The proclamation to the army, signed by the Emperor and countersigned by General Bertrand, foretold victory. "Victory will march forward with the charge-step," it said; "the eagle, with the national colours, will fly from steeple to steeple, till it reaches the towers of Nôtre Dame." But, my friends, there was no sign of it these first few days. "Mount the tricoloured cockade, resume the eagles you bore at Austerlitz, at Jena, at Lutzen!" cried the proclamation; but devil a striped cockade did we see outside the eleven hundred. "Soldiers," said the proclamation, "in my exile I heard your voice. I am arrived through every obstacle, through every danger. Your General, called to the throne by the voice of the people, and raised on your shields, is restored to you. Come and join him."

'It was like a trumpet-call, messieurs, but never a recruit did we get. You ask how I remember all these words. Let me tell you. On the brig all who could write a fair hand had the honour of copying both proclamations. You would have laughed had you seen officers and soldiers and the very seamen with their elbows squared, scribbling away for dear life, as though it were a boys' school. I wrote with the rest, and the fiery words burned into my very brain. Listen to what he told the French people. He showed that the country had been betrayed, that Paris and Lyons had been given up by Augereau and Marmont, vile traitors that they were. He made clear why he had banished himself to Elba, with a handful of his brave fellows as a guard, and then he calls on

them: "Frenchmen, in my exile I heard your complaint and wishes. You called for that Government of your own choice which alone is legitimate. You blamed my long slumber, you reproached me with sacrificing the great interests of the country to my own repose. I have crossed the sea amidst perils of every kind; I arrive among you to resume my rights, which are also yours."

'Grand! is it not, my friends?'

'It went on to quote history, to show that every nation had the right to free itself from a yoke imposed by a foreign enemy victorious for a time, and then it finished: "It is to you only, and to the brave men of the army, that I make and shall always make it my glory to owe everything."'

'Ay, ay,' growled Babbitôt; 'but the army might have come first.'

'Out upon you, old grumbler!' cried Gironde; 'and once more, gentlemen, the Emperor, and then we shall follow him to the capital.'

'Bravo! the Emperor!' shouted the others.

Neil Darroch did not stir. These very proclamations, packed with what he considered lies and fulsome flatteries, had done more to set him against Napoleon than anything he had seen, and yet in their way they were masterpieces.

'You will understand that I, Jules Gironde, late of the thirty-second of the line, and then of the secret service, had exceptional opportunities of seeing all that passed. I was given charge of the Emperor's person. It was my duty to look out for suspicious fellows, to listen and report. I had the help of Monsieur Deschamps there on more than one ticklish occasion, for, as you may suppose, there was more than one gentleman of the stiletto about. The Bourbons have always made use of the assassin. In due time I shall tell you what befell at Auxerre; at present we shall consider the march from Antibes to Grenoble.

'I have said we did not get one recruit. I was wrong. Two soldiers joined us—two men who may yet become Marshals of France. All honour to them, I say! They are a poor lot yonder in the south-east. At Cannes they did not turn a hair. They stared and jabbered, the dull fools! At Grasse they were cowards.

'They professed to be with us, and how many joined, think you? One—and he a tanner. Bless his leather breeches, say I, and this to his health! A gendarme came in on the march across the mountains to Digne. May he live to be a chief of police! Four men in as many days, and yet we never quailed. Instead, we covered thirty miles in twenty hours, and that over a mere track amongst precipices, and through scenery like that of the accursed island Corsica, which to me is only bearable in that it produced Napoleon Buonaparte.

'Imagine my anxiety as we advanced upon Grenoble, where was a whole regiment under Marchand. To be sure, there was a small garrison at Digne which retired, but we knew they were friendly. At Sisteron, where two rivers meet, there is a citadel and a garrison also, but Masséna had got word by this time, and sent a corps of observation from Marseilles, which overawed them. Otherwise the brave fellows had been with us. It was not our policy to fight just then, so we passed on.

'And now, my friends, the good peasants came flocking to join our standards, all in their blue blouses and sabots, their brown faces alight with enthusiasm, their horny hands ready to strike a blow for their rightful King. Had you seen their weapons—scythes, and pitchforks, and old muskets which you fire from rests—you would have grinned as I did. The Emperor was well pleased, but he had no use for such. He drank vin ordinaire with them to show his affection, but he knew—none better—that this was not the material he wanted.

'And now, messieurs, we come to the greatest scene of all. We approach Grenoble, as you know, a fortress on the Isère. We are in a beautiful land, and our spirits rise. All about us are great mountains, with little lakes nestling in their folds; there is the murmur of running water; the world is green and fresh. Tramp, tramp, on we plod, very dusty, very wearied, but full of faith. I, who am acquainted with these valleys, know that here we shall be faced, if at all.

'And so it is. As we swing along the highway, what is it that we see in front? The old sight, friends —the old sight. The gleam of sun upon steel, the flash of rippling light upon the bayonets. You know it, friend Babbitôt?'

'Too well—too well!' cried the old sergeant in a shaky voice. 'But go on, Jules Gironde; you had the skirmishers out, had you not?'

'Trust the Emperor for that. We were not taken unawares, but there they were, a regiment of the line massed upon the road, and we could hear their officers shouting and swearing at them.

'The Emperor dismounts. You know the figure, the brave figure in a gray surtout, with cocked hat and the striped cockade? Faith! and the officers in front knew it too, and trembled in their boots. What then, think you? The Emperor advances on foot, at the regulation pace, straight towards the line of levelled muskets. Men have told me their hearts ceased beating as they saw him face the foe, but, messieurs, if my pulse quickened in the least, it was not with fear. I, Jules Gironde, knew what would happen.

'Someone—may he rot in hell!—cries "Fire!" but there is not even the clicking of a trigger. The line of barrels wavers up and down like that of a recruit company for the first time in action. I laugh to myself as I see the old mahogany faces behind them. "These," say I to myself, "are veterans; they will

remember, even though they have never seen their General in such a shabby coat."

'He halts. A skylark is trilling away somewhere overhead. I take it as a good omen. There is not a sound now to drown his song. "This," I say to myself, "is history." The Emperor halts. Suddenly he throws open his coat.

'"Soldiers of the Fifth," he exclaims, "behold me! You have been told I am afraid of death. Here is my bosom; if there be one soldier among you who wishes to kill his Emperor, he can. I come to offer myself to your assault."'

Two great tears hopped down Babbitôt's furrowed cheeks.

'And then?' he asked huskily.

'Then,' said Gironde, 'there was no longer a regiment, nothing but a mob of men who sobbed like children and could hardly cry "Vive l'Empereur!" for the lumps in their throats. They thronged about him, they knelt in the dust and kissed his shoes, they struggled with each other to be the first to touch the frayed skirt of his old gray coat. I do not know what he said, or how he looked, for he was lost to sight amongst the crowd, but I saw a good dozen of the grenadiers rubbing their eyes.

'As for me, I vowed it would have been worth while to lose a third ear to see such a sight, and I knew that all danger was past. The word Laffray would be like a beacon signalling all through France, from the frontier garrisons in the north to the army with Soult in the south-east, summoning them all to join the eagles, and so it proved, and so it proved.'

The Gascon paused for breath. He was greatly excited, and fairly carried away by his tale. He wiped his forehead and said not a word for fully five minutes, but no one, not even Perrier, broke the silence. Outside in the Rue du Bac they could hear the bustle of the citizens, the shrill voices of the paper-sellers shouting the news of the Emperor's arrival.

"Soldiers of the Fifth," he exclaims, "behold me!"—Page 226.

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From the room below came the chorus of a martial song, one of the many which were bawled in every café of Paris for the next few weeks. A fine mellow voice sang a verse of which the listeners above could not discern the words, and then came a burst to which Gironde beat time with his glass and Babbitôt with his stick:

'Though days were dark,
Though days were drear,
Though rare the smile,
Though oft the tear,
We of the army, tried and true,
Amongst the clouds yet saw the blue.
Napoleon's glory cannot fade,
So drink we to the old cockade.'

'And we also, my friends!' cried Jules, smiling all over his stout and shining face. 'That was the way with these men of the Fifth. Sapristi! as they say in Italy; every man of them had the tricolour at the foot of his knapsack, and out it came after Laffray, like—what shall I say? A moment. Ah! now I have it—like the old hedgehog when the spring sun warms him. You catch my meaning? It is not safe to meddle with the little fellow, for he is all prickles. His motto—let me see, it is that of Scotland. Monsieur Deschamps, you have Scotch blood in your veins, and you will tell it us.'

Neil shook his head. He did not like the turn the conversation had taken.

'No matter,' said Babbitôt; 'their motto will not help the bare legs when the Emperor comes to deal with them.'

Neil Darroch smiled grimly for a moment, and then passed his hand across his face to hide the pain which had come into it. He need not have troubled, for Gironde was again speaking, and the company were all attention.

'It is in the middle of all this confusion that a big man on a big horse comes pushing his way into the

press, with a cockade half the size of his rusty hat. He wears the uniform of the national guard, and he wears it with honour, for he cries out:

'"Sire, I am Jean Dumoulin, the glove-maker. I bring to your Majesty a hundred thousand francs, and my arm."

'How we cheered him, my friends! He must have been a proud man as he rode at the head of the column. Pouf! what did we care now for Grenoble and its emigrants! You may be sure they deserved their name a second time, for we were in the town by night, and I assure you that I, Jules Gironde, fat, without ears, and fifty years of age, might have kissed the prettiest girl in it, so glad were the folk to see us.'

Perrier heaved a sigh almost terrifying in its intensity.

'Pardon me,' he said, 'but what have I not missed! Continue, friend Jules, but spare my feelings, I entreat of you.'

The Gascon shook his head at him.

'You do not deserve it, my boy, but I shall pay you the compliment of saying that it was pleasant to hear the cavalry clatter again. The Emperor entered Lyons with six hundred of them at his heels, every sabre of them a handsomer fellow than you, Perrier, with all your pomade and silver braid. The eleven hundred of Antibes had now become seven thousand, and success was assured. Lyons, as some of you know, is a fine city. As for me, the Rhone is my favourite river, and never did it look fairer than when twenty thousand citizens lined its quays to bid us welcome. Where now, I ask you, were Macdonald, Monsieur, and the Duke? Where was St. Cyr? Away to carry the news to Louis Bourbon that he had better scuttle back to Holland.

'It was at Lyons the Emperor struck the first blow at his enemies. He would not shed a drop of blood, but his decrees must have made that fox Talleyrand

quake — ay, and Marmont and Augereau and Dalberg, who owed everything to him, but spun round like weathercocks when the wind was contrary.

'We found two regiments of the line and the thirteenth dragoons waiting to join us, and learned that a veteran of the Twentieth had bearded Macdonald himself, casting his words in his teeth when the faithless General spoke of honour and fidelity.

'"To Napoleon we owe the oath," he said, "to march with the Emperor after having abandoned the King: in that alone consists our fidelity."

'Such, my friends, was the spirit of the army. As another said, "Not a soldier will fight against his father." Behold us, then, no longer a forlorn hope, but a mighty force marching to restore liberty and peace, to place France in the forefront of the nations. They tell me Ney has promised to carry Napoleon to Paris in an iron cage. I laugh when I hear it, for I know old Red Face too well. They call him the bravest of the brave, and he will not sully his name. At Auxerre he meets his master. I did not see the interview, which was in private—one cannot see everything—but I hear of it. What, think you, was the sole punishment the Emperor inflicted on him for his delay in joining us? He would not see him the night he arrived. That was all—not a harsh word, not a single reproach, and yet it must have stung the Marshal to the quick. They have lied about him; no doubt they will lie about him to the end of the chapter, but here and now, gentlemen, I call on you to drink the health of the best General of them all. I thank you,' said Gironde, when the glasses were again emptied and filled, 'but I am as hoarse as a crow.'

'And as drunk as an owl,' laughed Perrier.

'Yet not so drunk as a certain hussar,' retorted Jules. 'But with your permission, my friends, I will tell you of an incident at Auxerre, which will show

you that Jules Gironde yet has his wits about him. On the march I had made myself acquainted with all that was passing. I sucked in news as a bee sucks honey, and, like honey, it was for the most part sweet; but now and then I got a bitter mouthful to make me wary. You have no doubt heard how some dogs of Vendeans, disguised as women and as soldiers, were sent from Paris to make away with Napoleon. He laughed when he was told, and took no precautions, but I did. I trapped one of the villains in a little inn half a mile from the town, but another set on me, and had it not been for Monsieur Deschamps there, who twisted his neck for him, there would have been no Jules Gironde to quaff your wine to-day. Think of it!'

Jules's voice broke. He was growing pathetic about himself.

Neil Darroch, bowing his acknowledgments to the applause this statement called forth, wondered how he was to get his friend home.

'But that,' said the Gascon, 'was a mere bagatelle. My triumph came when in a staff officer I detected a spy; and how, you ask? By his green pantaloons, as I am an old soldier—the breeches of Artois' guards, which he had forgotten to change! Pouf! he would not have done for the Emperor's service. He deserved a firing-party, but they let him go.'

'They let too many go,' said the civilian. 'Fouché is a snake in the grass, whose head should come off in the Place de Grève, and there are a dozen others who would be better under lock and key.'

'You are right, cousin Maxime,' answered Gironde. 'It is the Emperor's only fault. Like me, he has too kind a heart.' And forthwith the emotional Gascon cried softly to himself.

There was no more to be got out of Gironde that day, and the civilian, Maxime Despard, who had gone with the royal army to Fontainebleau, took up the tale.

'Since the days of the Terror I cannot remember

Paris so excited as it has been since the news came of the Emperor's landing; and this is the way the reports have run, in geographical progression, so to speak: "The Tiger has broken out of his den." "The Monster was three days at sea." "The Scélérat has landed at Frejus." "The Brigand has arrived at Grenoble." "The Invader has entered Lyons." "Napoleon slept last night at Fontainebleau." "The Emperor enters the Tuileries this day." The last was yesterday's bulletin; what, then, will be the next?'

'The next,' cried old Babbitôt—'the next is easy to guess. It will be, "The Conqueror has again conquered."'

'So much,' said Neil Darroch to himself—'so much for peace and liberty.'

'As most of you are aware,' continued Despard, who was a portly man with a heavy cast of features, 'I was attached to the commissariat, and so was at Fontainebleau. Long before I left the capital, however, one could see how things were going. The little weathercocks in Paris were turning with the wind. There was a placard posted on the Vendôme Column, of which Gironde there might have been the author. "Napoleon to Louis XVIII.," it ran. "My good brother, it is useless to send me any more troops. I have enough."'

'Superb!' exclaimed the Gascon. 'As you say, cousin, worthy of me—of Jules Gironde. Does anyone here deny it?'

No one apparently did.

'Any fool could have seen the soldiers would never oppose Napoleon. The day at Fontainebleau merely added to his triumph. It was very different from the last time he was there. The whole army was drawn up at Melun to give battle to the Invader, as they called him. It covered the road to Paris, and we waited. I have never heard such stillness as reigned all over the plain. There was not a sound but the

bands playing and the orders of the officers. It was Laffray over again on a larger scale, though I cannot describe it like our friend. The ground slopes up to the woods about Fontainebleau, and no enemy was in sight. Suddenly we heard a noise. "Cavalry!" said a man near me; but instead we saw a carriage emerge from the forest, and a troop of horse. It came rattling down the road, and we saw there were three men in it. They were the Emperor, with his head bare, Bertrand and Drouot. In a moment there was one roar of "Long live the Emperor!" "It is he, Napoleon—Napoleon the Great!" cried the veterans, and the National Guard took up the cry. The troops broke from the ranks as the Emperor waved his hand to them. Their leaders, seeing that all discipline was at an end, took to flight, and then, as if it had been a play at the Opera, we saw the Old Guard come swinging down the hill with the eagles at their head, and a band crashed into the Imperial March. Do you know what Frederick the Great once said? He said that if the god Mars were to select his bodyguard from the inhabitants of this world, he would choose the French grenadiers. I, who saw them at Fontainebleau, can well believe it.'

'Ay, ay, they are fine men!' growled Babbitôt; 'but give me the voltigeurs.'

'Everyone to his own taste,' said Despard quietly; 'I need tell you no more. You saw them carry the Emperor up the stairs, you saw how they divided the flap of his coat, you know how it has ended. I am a quiet man, gentlemen, and I have a wife and family, but I would give ten years of my life for the Emperor to pinch my ear as he pinched Bertrand's this morning, and to say to me as he said to him, "This brave fellow has never abandoned me."'

'Bravo, Maxime!' cried Gironde; 'you have done well. Once more, and for the last time, the Emperor!'

'The Emperor!' echoed the others.

'There is a rumour about that a plot has been discovered to blow him up,' said one of the company.

'What!' cried the Gascon, staggering to his feet; 'you listen to such stuff as that? When you want information, do not take it from any common spy, sir, but apply to me—to me, Jules Gironde, of the secret service. Let us be going, friend Noël.'

On Neil's arm the little man left the room, trying hard to master his wayward legs.

'Steady, steady!' said Neil, as Jules lurched up against him.

'It is easy to command, but not to obey,' muttered Gironde; 'for I am very drunk, yes, very drunk, but not for myself, you understand, Monsieur Deschamps —not for myself.' He came to a stop and made a feeble attempt at the salute. 'Pour l'Empereur!' he mumbled, and resigned himself to Neil Darroch's care.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ASSASSINS

FAITHFULLY and fully as Gironde had told his tale, there was yet one incident he did not record, though it was far from being unimportant. The reason is simple: he was unaware that it had occurred.

Carlo Massoni, after being baffled in his attempt to revenge himself upon the Gascon, saw, or thought he saw, an excellent opportunity to take vengeance on more than Jules Gironde. There were now in Elba three men with whom he had accounts to settle—the Emperor, his servant, and the stranger who called himself Noël Deschamps.

Therefore Massoni determined to visit that island at an early date. He would no doubt have done so had not Providence determined otherwise. It is a

dangerous thing at any time to kill a Corsican and remain in Corsica.

Vezzani had a brother, and that brother was not satisfied as to the way in which Vezzani had met his death. When he found that, as Gironde had surmised, Massoni had been in no hurry to save the Villa Olima from the flames, his suspicions were confirmed. Vezzani's body was not so charred and destroyed but that he could detect some trace of a wound in the chest. This, coupled with the account of what had happened on the eventful morning, and with the evidence of the boy, who had been found trussed up like a fowl, was enough for Vezzani's brother. He took a solemn oath to put a bullet in Carlo Massoni, and he kept his vow.

He himself was promptly despatched by men sent in pursuit, and he would not have died quite so satisfied with himself as he did had he known that Massoni's wound, though severe, was not fatal. It was, however, sufficient to lay that dangerous villain by the heels for several long and weary months, and to keep him out of mischief for even a lengthier period.

Eventually he did recover, and, far from being chastened in spirit, was as anxious as ever to carry out his nefarious designs.

This, he speedily discovered, was no easy matter. Elba was guarded, and it was known that one of the assassins of Georges, a bloodthirsty wretch, had been sent to Corsica in the hope that he might get access to Napoleon's person. Therefore Corsica was watched.

Fortune favours the brave, however, and up to this time in his chequered career no one had been able to accuse Carlo Massoni of cowardice. He renewed his acquaintance with the governor, Bruslart, a man as unscrupulous as himself, who formed plan after plan for getting Buonaparte into his power.

This creature of the Bourbons one day sent for Massoni, who was haunting Bastia like a restless and

evil spirit, and gave him some information which was much to his liking.

'I have news,' said he, 'that three days hence Napoleon expects a certain visitor, who is to sail in a felucca from Leghorn. What his arrival portends it would be hard to say, but I think it would be well, Signor Massoni, if the Governor of Corsica were to interview him before the King of Elba.'

Massoni bowed, and his face expressed his desire to learn more.

'There are few men I can trust in this accursed island,' continued Bruslart—'as regards this matter, I mean, but you are one of them.'

Again Massoni bowed, as if endorsing this statement. In reality, he did not believe it for a moment. He knew himself better than did Bruslart.

'It is then,' the latter explained, 'my intention to send out a vessel well armed, and with a numerous crew, to intercept this felucca and bring the emissary here. He may carry important papers, he may not, but he will have a tongue in his head, and I have means to make him use it. You understand me?'

'One would be a fool if he did not,' replied Massoni.

'Very good, signor; then will you accept command of this little expedition? It will merely be a pleasant trip, and the weather promises well.'

Massoni was too crafty to jump at the offer. He made numerous inquiries, he haggled over the price of his services, and at last, as he had intended from the first, he accepted.

A fast schooner was placed at his disposal, and in the night she cleared out of the harbour, and headed for the north-east. Everything down to a certain point happened as Bruslart had designed it should happen.

The felucca, when two days out from Leghorn, was sighted and overhauled. There was no resistance. On board her was a single passenger, who carried

himself with a military air, and wore a long blue cloak, suspiciously like a French officer's. This individual's language was excessively violent. So harmless had been the schooner's movements, so ignorant was he of all matters pertaining to the sea, that he did not realize he was in danger till Massoni's men came crowding over the side. He had no time to remove a cipher hidden in the heel of one of his boots. He fervently trusted it would remain hidden, but Massoni had not wandered half round the globe for nothing.

The felucca continued her voyage unharmed, but with a different crew, and with Carlo Massoni in a completely different set of clothes, for the emissary was a man much of his own size. The original wearer of the blue cloak and the frock-coat was conveyed in the schooner to Bastia, where Bruslart threatened to murder him, and cursed Massoni till the emissary thanked him.

There was a ball in progress at Porto Ferrajo, one of the many which Napoleon organized, and which he attended as a rule with a very bad grace, disgusted at the plebeian company in which he found himself. This night, however, he wore a more lively air, chatted freely with several of the leading inhabitants, and himself led the applause which greeted the efforts of the musicians.

He was now looking stout and well, his movements were brisk, his voice pleasant. At times a close observer might have fancied that his plump, sunburnt, and somewhat bilious visage took on a look of expectancy—that he glanced without cause at the door. Otherwise there was nothing peculiar in his behaviour. He was courtesy itself to Madame Mère, who sat upon a raised dais and surveyed the groups before her with who can say what feelings? She, who had seen her son moving hither and thither amongst the most brilliant assemblages, the cynosure of every eye, the beheld of all beholders, now

witnessed him playing the host to the wives and daughters of Italian tradesfolk, directing a gathering of humble people with whom he had nothing in common, whom she knew he despised, but who alone, of many millions, now owned his sway.

Colonel Campbell was not present, neither was Drouot, the Governor; but General Bertrand, a man of few talents, but great in his devotion, smiled affably upon the company, and shrugged his broad shoulders as he thought of the past.

Suddenly a black face, surmounted by a turban, appeared at the door, gazed a moment in the Emperor's direction, and then vanished.

It belonged to Rustan, his body-servant, and was a signal that the expected emissary had arrived.

Napoleon finished a conversation he was holding with an officer of his guard, and crossed the room, followed by Bertrand. He bowed once or twice on his way, waved his hand as a direction for the band to continue, and disappeared.

There was not an Elban in the saloon who did not feel more at his ease after the short, thick-set figure in the blue coat and white breeches had vanished. The Emperor exchanged a few words with Rustan, and then mounted the stairs leading to his apartments.

He motioned Bertrand to remain in the antechamber, and, unattended, passed into his private room, which was lit by a candelabra.

He immediately, and without turning, closed the door behind him, and faced a tall man in a blue cloak who was standing in the centre of the room, and who bowed slightly as he entered.

'You are late, sir,' said the Emperor sharply. His tone was harsh and imperative.

'No, I am not *too* late,' answered the other quietly, though there was a gleam in his dark eyes, and an emphasis laid on the last word but one.

Napoleon advanced a couple of steps.

'I permit none to question what I say,' he replied; 'and, moreover, it was a mistake to travel in such a dress.'

The man remained silent and motionless. What was it that kept him rooted to the spot, that hindered him from springing forward and driving home the weapon grasped in his right hand? It was neither more nor less than the look on the Emperor's face.

Napoleon had halted, and now stood staring at him intently, marking his increasing agitation, noting the tremor which had fastened upon him.

There was something terrifying in the Emperor's gaze; his lips were tightly shut, his chin thrust forward, his neck sunk between his shoulders, his brows drawn down into a frown, and there was a glitter in his eyes which by the candle-light looked almost black. It was as if he were reading the man's soul.

'What are you here for?' he asked suddenly.

Carlo Massoni started; he threw back his head, and made as though he would advance.

'I am here to—to—well, to stab you to the heart!' he stammered; but his voice shook.

'Then, why waste time?' was the answer—'your own time and mine. Are you aware that two minutes have passed since I first saw you?'

Again there was silence, broken only by the sound of a man breathing heavily.

'Have done with this folly!' said the Emperor sternly. 'I am not destined for the stiletto, and you were not destined to use it against such as I.'

Massoni's white teeth fastened fiercely on his underlip. He was cursing himself, but he was powerless. He had been mastered by a master mind.

Napoleon turned his back upon him and pulled open the door.

'Bertrand!' he called out.

'Sire!'

'There has been a slight mistake here. You will see that this person is searched, and then that he

quits the island this night. There must be no disturbance, no whisper as to his presence.'

'Go!' he added, wheeling round and pointing with his finger. 'Go, sir, and profit by what you have seen and heard.'

Carlo Massoni went. Many a time and oft was he to ask himself bitterly what had possessed him to let pass the chance for which he had waited and watched. All had gone well. Gironde was absent at Longone; none had suspected him; the cipher had been an efficient passport, and yet he had failed. The buffoon at whom he had sneered was in his power, alone, unarmed. He had meant to strike at once, and yet—Carlo Massoni, at last, had learned that a mere animal courage will not always serve a man; but was it fear which had unnerved him? He could not return to Corsica; Elba was shut against him, there remained only Paris—Paris and Craspinat.

There was nothing noble about Massoni; he had not even Jan Holland's admiration for a brave man; thus, once he recovered from his chagrin and despondency, the thought which came uppermost in his mind was if he might not even yet accomplish his purpose. He dare not do the deed with those terrible eyes piercing his very brain, with that heavy-jawed face, set and stern, staring into his, imperious, commanding, with the influence of that dread presence upon him; but there was perhaps another method.

He was to be doubly surprised when he reached the house off the Rue de Gramont, for not only had it new occupants, but it had lost an inhabitant. Emile d'Herbois was dead.

Kate Ingleby's troubles began with the time when Charles Deschamps lost even what reason remained to him, and became a mere imbecile, subject to night terrors, scarcely able to feed or clothe himself, feeble in his gait, dirty in his habits, and fearful as a child.

Emile d'Herbois would have sent him to an asylum,

but the girl would not hear of it. In those days the great Esquirol was indeed living, but he had scarcely begun his beneficent reforms, and the insane were too often housed and treated worse than the brute beasts. Kate had heard as much, and was firm.

'He shall not go,' she said quietly. 'I would never forgive myself if he died in such a place. Did he not in a way act as my protector? Did he not do his best to help me when Monsieur Darroch was drunk, and threatening me with violence?'

'But who is to look after him? He will need an attendant,' said her uncle testily.

'I shall attend him,' she answered simply, and she kept her word.

Soon the poor old man was not happy unless she were somewhere near him. He would take no food but from her hands; he seemed in all his misery to remember who she was, and the girl, though at times she found it in her heart to wish that death might relieve her of her charge, and Charles Deschamps from his dementia, yet did her duty bravely, and to her uncle appeared always bright and cheery, while his old servant worshipped her.

For all that, Kate was never told that such a creature as Craspinat resided in the basement. If Emile d'Herbois feared his unwelcome guest, his servant was still more a victim of terror. Craspinat had fascinated her, and she dared not disobey.

Craspinat was the willing slave of Carlo Massoni; Victorine, the servant of Emile d'Herbois, was the slave of Craspinat. She was an old woman, timid and gentle, and was soon as helpless as a fly tangled in the meshes of a web. It was as if Craspinat had sucked all the volition out of her, and left her a mere automaton.

If Kate Ingleby had not been so occupied in looking after Charles Deschamps, she must have noticed the change which gradually came over the household, the unrest, the dread, the doubt.

It was nothing marked or definite, scarcely more than a shadow, but it was the shadow of Craspinat. Even as it was, the girl remarked her uncle's irritation, his worried appearance, his abstraction; but she attributed it to ill-health. She was so far correct. Emile d'Herbois was not the man he had been, otherwise he would not have had dealings with Carlo Massoni; but he had developed a hesitancy, a want of decision, which is not unfrequently seen in men of his age. He resolved to tell his niece the cause of his trouble, but as usual imagined there was no need of haste, and was loath to add to her burdens.

But he knew Craspinat's secret, and on that account alone was doomed. Moreover, Craspinat had a plan. This wretched being owed her life to Carlo Massoni. In his youth, before he became a hardened ruffian, Massoni was capable of doing a kindness. He had one day come across an infuriated mob attacking a thing like a hobgoblin, which faced them with tooth and nail. 'Kill the wizard!' the crowd had roared. 'To the Seine with him! See how his hair falls off—he hath a devil!'

The wretched creature, catching perhaps a gleam of pity in Massoni's eyes, had made a sudden dart to his side, and almost before he realized what had happened he found himself regarded as its protector. He had to fight, and fight he did, and the creature fought with him till at last they both won clear and found safety.

Then he learned that it was a woman he had saved—a woman to whom Nature had been so unkind, whose life had been so horrible, that as a mere mitigation of her sufferings, and as a protection, she had adopted a disguise which caused her to be feared, and eventually gained for her a livelihood.

Since that time he had but to raise his finger, and Craspinat crawled to his feet. She was his, body and soul, and yet he spurned her. She did not repine, and her occupation consoled her.

It was after his first departure from Paris that she conceived the idea of constructing an infernal machine, and to this she bent all her energies. She had at first no special object in view: it was only her delight in destruction, her unholy glee in doing something which would make her famous, and the mere wild excitement produced by working with deadly materials, an unhealthy excitement such as she craved for ever since the days of the Terror, that induced her to occupy herself. Latterly, however, influenced by Massoni's wild words, by the talk of the populace, she had fixed on one as a victim, on one who alone was worthy to perish by the famous bomb of Craspinat. She determined to procure imperishable fame for herself by destroying Napoleon.

To this end she worked, but kept her designs a dead secret, to be revealed in time to Carlo Massoni, who would surely give her a word of praise and join with her in the great enterprise. So said Craspinat to herself.

This, however, as has been hinted, was not Craspinat's only plan. The other was the destruction of Emile d'Herbois. She knew, for Massoni had told her, the fate of the money which was to have aided the cause of the Jacobins. She determined this money should become Massoni's. It is true she might have killed Kate Ingleby, but she was wise. She might have to acknowledge failure in her attempt on D'Herbois' life, and it would be well that the girl should remain, as then Massoni might wed her and secure the fortune.

'After that——!' said Craspinat, and cackled to herself, for Craspinat could be jealous.

But it was decreed that she should not still further burden her soul with blood-guiltiness, and yet that things should favour her designs. Craspinat had one pleasure in life, a pleasure which was in keeping with her repulsive nature. It was the joy of a daily visit to what is now called 'la Morgue.' She was

ever the first to appear at that ghastly abode of the dead, and feast her perverted senses on the gruesome and the horrible, and it so happened that there she met Emile d'Herbois, who had been found dead in the streets, laid out upon a slab. He had played with time, and time for him had changed suddenly to eternity; for his heart was soft in texture as well as in sentiment; it had in a moment ceased to act.

Craspinat chuckled and scuttled back to the house off the Rue de Gramont, where all slept, save, perhaps, poor Charles Deschamps. Then Craspinat made a search, found certain papers, and descended with them to the basement.

To Kate Ingleby her uncle's death came as a heavy shock. He had always been kind, and he was her one relative on earth. But another shock awaited her. The notary came—a dry, cold man of law. He fussed and fumed, for though he had a legal bearing, he was none the less a Frenchman. He knew the conditions of the will, but there was no will to be found. There were no papers or drafts even which would procure the money he knew belonged to D'Herbois' niece—the girl, beautiful as Marie Antoinette, the notary told himself (he was a Frenchman and married), who showed a marvellous self-control, and had her uncle buried in the Protestant fashion, despite the lawyer's remonstrances.

Emile d'Herbois had been what he called a Theist, and in life had never let a priest poke his prying nose within the door.

Kate Ingleby, daughter of a Puritan, resolved to respect his wishes, but in doing so she made an enemy of the notary, who was not so thorough in his search as he might otherwise have been. The result was that Craspinat and her doings remained unknown. Victorine, ignorant and superstitious, would not have opened her lips for untold gold. Had not Craspinat even prophesied her master's death? A man who could do this could do anything.

Kate Ingleby further angered the notary by her replies to his manifold questions. It seemed to him she was trying to conceal something. And he was right. The girl knew what had been her uncle's chief desire in life, and now that he was dead and the papers missing, a suspicion crossed her mind. She strove to throw it aside, but could not. She now thought there had been another reason for the change in Emile d'Herbois—that he had harboured a guilty conscience. She feared that, after all his protestations, he had used the money for his own ends. She was unjust, but scarcely to blame, for, as has been said, Emile d'Herbois had a sinister expression, and one is apt to judge a man by his appearance. It was this fear that kept her lips sealed. She would not for a moment hint at it, and so she found herself well nigh a beggar. The house was old, and she was permitted to stay in it for the time being, much to her relief; but she had no friends, and hers was the pride which will not suffer charity.

A brilliant idea came to her, and she acted upon it with that straightforwardness and decision which were her father's legacy. She made use of her wonderful voice.

At first she had a hard struggle, but eventually a way was opened up to her. In what consisted her success will yet be evident, but before it reached its height Carlo Massoni appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER VII.

THE AUDIENCE

THE first few weeks after the Emperor's arrival in the capital were sufficiently lively to divert Neil's thoughts from the gloomy channel in which they had coursed. Paris was in a state of ferment, full of fear and rumours, crowded to excess,

at first delirious with joy, then sullen and apathetic. Gironde was here, there, and everywhere; and for the first time Neil perceived that the Gascon, when he settled to work, was a man of great ability. His bombast and his excitement both vanished in large measure. He became crafty and secretive, though in Neil's presence he spoke freely enough. The city was a perfect hotbed of conspiracy. Plots were being hatched by half a dozen different parties—by the royalists, by republicans, by mere gold-greedy desperadoes; but their object was the same—to compass the death of the Emperor.

Neil Darroch, whatever his views, had no sympathy with such villainy. Together they visited the cafés and wine-shops. A favourite hunting-ground of Gironde's was the Café Montansier, in the Palais Royal, where congregated hundreds of officers who had served in the late wars. Here they gave themselves to a mad revelry, men of nearly every European nation vying with each other in drinking bumpers to the coming campaign, which was the hope of every one of them, embracing each other as some popular song stirred up old recollections, shouting choruses, and yelling themselves hoarse.

Even here the Gascon found his victims, and tracked them to their lairs, where the hand of Fouché, Chief of Police, fell heavily on them if it was thought worth while to make an example.

Gironde was hopeful as ever. He did not seem to observe, as did Neil, that most of the enthusiasm was limited to the army. The populace were indifferent. All they wanted was a settled government and the peace to which France had been so long a stranger. They fancied at first that it had returned with Napoleon, and it was not the Emperor, but what they imagined he represented, that they had welcomed. Most significant was the cry of the working class: 'The great Contractor has returned; we shall now eat bread!' By way of answer came the great review in

the Place Carrousel, which spelt defiance. The people had asked for bread; it was evident to any thoughtful man that, instead of bread, they were likely to be given war.

'We are on the point of marching,' said the Emperor to his battalions, 'to drive from our territory the auxiliaries of foreign princes. The nation will, no doubt, second our endeavours and follow our impulse.'

The nation had no desire to do one thing or the other. As the days ran into weeks there were signs of a general depression. From every side came word of gathering armies. It was apparent that Europe was summoning all her forces to grapple with her ancient foe. It was reported that Napoleon was gloomy and in poor health, that the National Guard was disaffected, that there were traitors in the Cabinet, and even in the army.

Meanwhile, Gironde fell ill, and Neil Darroch had at length an opportunity of showing his gratitude for the many kindnesses he had received at the hands of the Gascon. The illness was a touch of malaria, which kept Jules in bed, much to his disgust, though he was thankful to have such an able substitute as Neil proved himself to be.

'You would have made a good advocate, though a doubtful judge, my friend,' said Gironde to him; 'but you will be an excellent politician. In my profession you would not excel, though you have done well so far. Why? you ask. Simply because you are six feet three inches. In the secret service there is no room for giants—you would soon be known to every gossip. We spies must be common-looking fellows like myself. I do not mean that we must be ugly—as a young man I have made more than one heart flutter like a little canary bird—but we must be of ordinary build.

'A moderate-sized man may add to his inches or alter his appearance, but a steeple such as you are

remains a steeple, or becomes round in the back, which is still worse. Now, my boy, as you do not fancy handling a musket for a year or two, your ambition must be the portfolio, and I shall give you your chance. While you have been poking your big nose into odd corners and getting yourself disliked, I have been drawing up a report which must go to Fouché. I do not believe in writing when one has a tongue in one's head, but the matter is important, and it is also important that you should come under the notice of those in authority. This will procure for you an audience, and your wits must do the rest. Now, no refusal, my friend; I ask it as a favour. I know your heart is not with us, but I know also that you have not been well treated. Once you have an object in view, you will live, as I do, to serve the greatest man on earth; and I am much mistaken if you do not serve him faithfully.

'Let me now explain your mission. You think you know all that Jules Gironde has been doing during the past week. There you are wrong. Believe me, I do not doubt you, but it is best to keep some things to one's self. I discovered, just before this miserable shivering and sweating pounced on me, a new conspiracy. It is remarkable because there are few concerned in it. As a result, it is all the more likely to succeed. What is more, there is a woman in the business, and women are the very devil in an affair of this kind! Last night I got fresh information—never mind from what source. You, you old Huguenot, are not so indispensable as you imagine. The plot is not ripe; indeed, I know very little about it as yet, but I shall be out in two days, and then they had better look after their necks.

'For all that, I should never be forgiven if I did not send early information; and, besides, I have now rivals.' The Gascon sighed heavily. 'I repeat, I have rivals. In the old days I was supreme. When we have leisure I may tell you how I became known at every

Court, how I made my name once and, as I thought, for ever. Alas! I find I am forgotten by some of them, but we must remedy that; though, after all, if the Emperor is satisfied, it is not of much account. But they are all babes and sucklings compared with me, and I have the first clue here, at any rate. I benefit myself, I benefit you—two birds with one stone. You do not refuse me this small favour?'

'I would be a cur if I did,' answered Neil Darroch.

'You are a good fellow, Noël, though you would be better still had your mother wed a Frenchman; but now let me tell you the kind of man you are going to meet. Between ourselves, Fouché is the greatest rascal unhung. The Orator, as they call him, is worse than the Bishop, and that is saying a good deal, for Talleyrand is the most cunning rogue in Christendom! Fouché is not such a fox, but he is more of a wolf; he is greedy, he is treacherous, but, unlike the wolf, he is bold; one may best compare him to a hungry wolf. He has been useful to the Emperor, but I know that Napoleon hates him. In my opinion, his head should part company with his shoulders to-morrow, for no one can say what game he is now playing.

'However, that is not our business. Answer him shortly and without hesitation, but it is best to appear a little stupid and dull. He has a great contempt for a fool, and will not trouble you much if you appear vacant and reply in monosyllables. Men who have tried to appear too clever have suffered before now, for he is always on the outlook for people who might suspect him and prove troublesome. I shall never forget my first interview with him. Some day I shall tell it you. We understand each other now, I think, though he was but ill-pleased to find me very much alive. No matter; remember what I have told you, and keep your tongue in check. You will probably be insulted a dozen times in as many minutes, but you must neither lash him with the one weapon

nor pound him with the other.' And Gironde laughingly touched Neil's heavy knuckles. 'Here is a passport for the gate. You enter by the door on the right of the square. I shall expect you in an hour at most, as you will go and come in a hackney coach. Adieu, my friend, and may this be your first step to the Ministry.'

Neil laughed dryly, and set off without delay. He was just a trifle excited as he rattled over the causeway stones. He had put from him all desire of advancement, he regarded himself as a man with a career blasted; there had crept into his mind a conviction that a curse was upon him which was pursuing him to some bitter termination. But he was young. Despite his melancholy, his spirits would now and then rise, and he would build castles in the air, and dream of great undertakings and mighty achievements. Such fits were momentary, but one of them fastened upon him now as, with a bundle of sealed papers in the breast-pocket of his coat, he drove along the Rue de Rivoli to the gates of the ancient palace, once the abode of kings, now that of the man who was defying the armed might of Europe.

He had no difficulty in being admitted, and was respectfully attended by a servant in a gorgeous livery of blue and silver. As they proceeded along a passage decorated by a double row of statues they met a tall man in an undress uniform, whom Neil at once recognised as General Bertrand. He stopped and exchanged a few words with the lacquey.

'You wish to see the Duke of Otranto, I understand?' he said, turning to Neil, who, however, was ignorant of Fouché's title, and so replied:

'I have a report for the Minister of the Police.'

'Quite so; then be good enough to come with me. You can retire,' he added, with a nod to the servant, and led the way from one corridor to another till Neil was fairly bewildered by the ramifications of the huge palace.

At last they stopped before a door in front of which was hung a heavy curtain. Bertrand rapped thrice upon the panels and entered at once, beckoning Neil to follow.

A man was standing looking out of a window which commanded a view of the garden. He wheeled round as he heard their footsteps, and advanced rapidly towards them. It was the Emperor. He was dressed in a plain blue coat, with a single star upon the left breast, breeches of a brown nankeen, and black silk stockings. A single glance at his face told Neil Darroch that rumour for once spoke the truth. This was not the same man who had led them at an astonishing rate from the shores of the Mediterranean to the banks of the Seine. His jaws had become lean, his eyes were dull and heavy. He had lost flesh everywhere, save round the waist. His former appearance of a comfortable plumpness was gone. His clothes seemed to hang loosely on him, his paunch was pendulous. He was clearly unhealthy. For all that, his manner was brisk and alert.

'Who is this man?' he asked. He nodded vigorously as Bertrand told him. 'We shall make you a diplomatist yet, Count,' he laughed, and then bent his gaze on Neil Darroch. 'I have seen you before,' he said sharply.

'Yes, sire.' Instinctively Neil gave him his title.

'But where, sir, where?' he asked impatiently.

'On board the brig off the coast of Elba.'

'Ha! to be sure! you are the grenadier who came on board with Gironde—at least, you should have been a grenadier, and flank man of your company. Instead, what did you say you were?'

'An advocate, sire.'

'A lawyer? A bad trade, sir, but, like that of the surgeon, necessary; the latter lops off limbs, the former patrimonies. Both operations are meant to show us how little we are, how easily we may be crippled. But the surgeon is greater than the lawyer

—a single surgeon is worse than a whole congress of them. Ah! Bertrand, that is so, is it not?'

'It depends upon the subject, I should say,' answered the Count.

'Precisely; but what is your name, young man?'

'Noël Deschamps.'

'Deschamps? I have heard it before. Your accent is strange; what was your birthplace?'

'I am half a Scotchman, and was born in that country.'

'In Scotland; I see, your father being French. Do you know, Bertrand, that I was once supposed to be a Scotchman myself?'

'Impossible, sire!'

'So it would seem, yet the London journals gave credence to the report. They called me a poor fellow Oswald who was a member of a club I frequented, and with whom they asserted I changed names. He was killed in La Vendée—that is to say, I was killed and Oswald became the Emperor Napoleon, unhappy man that he was.'

The Emperor smiled and took snuff copiously from a plain wooden box. He was clearly in a good humour.

'And so you followed me to Elba with that faithful fellow Gironde. What have you done since?'

'I have continued to follow you, sire,' said Neil quietly.

'A good answer, I allow, but that scarcely filled your stomach, young man; you did not carry a musket.'

'I have assisted Monsieur Gironde.'

'And no doubt have proved useful. You are modest; that is well—the bravest men are those who say least about themselves. And now what is your business with Fouché?

'It is with the Minister of Police, sire.'

'What!'

The Emperor made a threatening gesture; but Neil

did not flinch, though he noticed the gust of passion which swept across Napoleon's face, and marked how his smile vanished and his lips met and were pressed tightly one against another till the colour left them.

'I merely state that Monsieur Gironde, who is ill, charged me to deliver the despatch to the Minister of Police. I am, as it were, his servant, and must do his bidding.'

'You are right, sir,' said the Emperor coldly, 'though your manners might be improved. It so happens, however, that Gironde is my servant, and so is the Duke of Otranto. I therefore order you to deliver those papers to me.'

Without a word Neil placed the bundle in his outstretched hand, and then bowed and made as if to retire.

'A moment, sir,' said the Emperor. 'Do you know Scotland well?'

'It was my home for many years.'

'Are the people content with being governed from London?'

'Some are not, sire; the majority are indifferent.'

'Indifferent? Good! I am obliged to you for your information, Monsieur Deschamps. You seem to be an intelligent person, who may yet come to something. But mark me, sir, be more careful in your address. You will convey my thanks to your master'—he laid emphasis on the word—'and say I hope he may soon be restored to health. And'—here he reached up and tapped Neil lightly on the left shoulder—'on the whole, the Emperor is very well pleased with you, Monsieur Deschamps, and bids you good-day.'

Neil Darroch retired, not knowing whether to be satisfied or angry at his reception. He had often, when in Edinburgh, heard men boast of how they would face the Emperor of the French, and defy him, if need be—how they would very quickly give the upstart monarch a piece of their minds, and show

their sturdy British independence. He wondered what those windbags would have done had they been in his place, and seen for a moment the Emperor's frown, and heard the harsh, rasping tones of his angry voice. He himself, with one exception, had studied Napoleon at a distance. Now he understood that, charlatan or no charlatan, this man was one born to reign, one who had reigned as no other had, and who would not brook the slightest opposition to his imperial wishes. He marvelled when he remembered how meekly he had stood in the presence of this little fat man and answered his questions. Had he but known it, he had presented a braver front than most of those whose lot it had been to confront Buonaparte in a passion. He had done more: he had impressed the Emperor by his bearing and his replies.

As he was driven swiftly back to his lodgings on the south side of the river, he again began to entertain hopes that life might yet hold something for him. The worn, anxious expression on Napoleon's face as he turned from the window had roused in him a feeling of pity. There was something pathetic as well as grand in this domineering spirit which had forced the fallen monarch to make one mighty effort to regain part, though only a part, of what he had won for himself by these years of war and intrigue and marvellous diplomacy.

There was something stirring in the thought that this pale, dejected, flabby little man was at that moment rousing all France, raising two millions of warriors from an exhausted country, holding the reins of government, and meeting plot with counter-plot; that he was the mainspring which had set in motion the vast mechanism required for a great campaign—the arsenals, the factories, the swarms of workmen, the military administrations; that it was against him, and him only, that huge armaments were moving, that England was pouring out her gold like

water, that curses were being cast by the peoples of at least six countries which had learned to dread his very name.

Whatever else he might be, this man was great, and Neil Darroch felt his greatness as he had never done before. He was possessed also by a feeling of importance. He had been the bearer of a secret message, the results of which might be very far-reaching. He was playing a part in the world's politics, so to speak, and, however humble it might be, it was not far removed from the axis round which most of the civilized world was spinning, and had been spinning for twenty years. The Emperor had said, 'On the whole, I am very well pleased with you, Monsieur Deschamps,' and for the first time for many days Neil Darroch also felt very well satisfied with himself. His step was buoyant as he climbed the rickety wooden stair which led to the rooms he inhabited with Gironde. He found that worthy in a state of uncontrollable excitement.

Jules was out of bed, hastily dressing himself, bathed in perspiration, and panting with his exertions.

'It is you!' he cried, as Neil entered. 'Thank God! I never expected to see you again.'

He threw himself into a chair and wiped the beads from his forehead.

'Why, what is wrong?' asked Neil, completely in the dark.

'God knows how much or how little is wrong, my boy! You have seen Fouché?'

'No, I have not.'

'You have not?' screamed the Gascon. 'Then whom have you seen?'

'I have seen two men,' answered Neil slowly—'that is, two of any importance.'

'Yes, yes; but quick! You will drive me mad! Who were they?'

'The first was General Bertrand, the second——'

'Yes?'

'The second was Fouché's master,' replied Neil, remembering Napoleon's words.

'Fouché's master! The Emperor, you mean? Embrace me, my friend—we are saved. This is superb!'

'But what is wrong?'

'Nothing now; but had you seen the Minister, my life at least would not have been worth a day's purchase. Listen! A man has just gone out, a man paid by me, who brings me certain information that there are four persons concerned in this plot. One of them you know already. He is Massoni—our old enemy Massoni; the second is, as I said, a woman; the third is their tool, gutter-bred, a mere machine; but the fourth—the fourth is Fouché himself!'

'Good Lord!' cried Neil. 'Are you sure?'

'As sure as I well can be; the man does not know as much, but he described the fourth conspirator, who meets in a certain house, which shall be nameless and numberless at present. The description is enough for me; the fourth, as I say, is Fouché!'

'Whew!' whistled Neil. 'This has been a narrow escape.'

'Let me hear it, then,' cried Jules impatiently, as Neil helped him into bed.

'Superb!' said Gironde again, when he had learned full particulars of Neil's mission. 'Things could not have turned out better both for you and for me, and yet it would have been amusing to have seen how the rascal looked when he read the papers.'

'I'm glad I was not amused in that way,' laughed Neil.

'Ta, ta, ta, my friend! It is very fine to see a man suddenly surprised.'

'So I can testify.'

'Pouf! I was a little upset; it is the fever. Feel my pulse now—as steady as the Guard under fire. To be sure, there was not a breath of suspicion in my report, but I would stake a third ear, if I had

one, that Fouché, knowing what he does of me, would have had me safe in the Temple before to-night at the latest.'

'But what can be his object?' asked Neil. 'Such perfidy is horrible. To have secret dealings with the King would be bad enough, considering his position, but to conspire against Napoleon's life!'

'His object is the same as it has always been—money, money! He is like an octopus with every sucker reaching for a piece of gold. As far as I can make out, his precious friends have a promise of forfeited estates from Louis, and were in a fair way to get them, when the Bourbon is sent, wringing his hands, over the frontier. Then comes their plot, and if Jules Gironde is anything of a spy, Fouché discovered it himself, and became their ally on promise of something very big, you may be sure. Who can say what he will do? To tell the truth, I would rather be in the Emperor's shoes than in Carlo Massoni's. The Orator is bad as an enemy, he is ten times worse as a friend.'

'And what is to be done now?'

'Nothing, my boy; we must wait and we must watch. Fouché can wriggle out of any accusation; he is like a slimy snake, crawling out of an old skin and putting on a new one; but give me proof, and give me time. Leave it to old Gironde. The Emperor in my hearing has said that Talleyrand will probably hang Fouché some fine day. What if Jules Gironde should do it!'

A week passed. The Gascon had been up and about for three days, and Neil had been left to his own devices; for Gironde gave him to understand that too many cooks in such a case would spoil the broth, and bade him occupy himself with the sights of the city and its surroundings. Somewhat to his surprise, Gironde proposed one evening that they should pay a visit to the Theatre of Varieties. Paris will be in dire straits before the doors of her places

of amusement are closed, and in spite of war-clouds and the prevailing depression, her stage-loving citizens still thronged the play-houses.

'It is time we had a little amusement,' said Gironde; 'and we may perhaps combine business with pleasure. The Varieties is most to my taste, and "la belle Americaine" is said to be charming. But perhaps you object; you are too strict, too proper—is it so?'

'When you are in Rome, do as the Romans,' laughed Neil. 'The Varieties be it; though I have no great liking for the play.'

'The play!' chuckled Gironde. 'It is scarcely to be so called; but no matter, you shall see it. I will wager you that Perrier will be there. He knows a pretty girl, and is a sad dog—only I know more;' and the Gascon nodded very wisely.

The place was packed, chiefly with the military, but the audience were cold and unresponsive, save when allusion was made to the Emperor, when there went up a roar which might have shaken the walls.

'They seem to care little about it all,' said Neil, 'and I do not wonder.'

'Patience,' said Gironde. 'They wait for mademoiselle.'

And he was right. As she came upon the stage, she was greeted with uproarious applause and showers of flowers, but Neil Darroch sat as one transfixed. This woman, dressed in a coquettish costume, who bowed and smiled, a woman of a rare and bewitching beauty, with a rich deep voice and pretty tricks of manner, and dainty dancing steps, was no other than the waif whom he had saved, it seemed to him, half a century ago. She was Kate Ingleby—but she was something more. As a fresh burst of applause heralded her appearance, Gironde bent towards him, and whispered in his ear:

'Behold the accomplice of the Minister of the Police!'

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT OF RECKONING

GIRONDE naturally enough attributed the intense astonishment depicted on his friend's face to his own surprising piece of information. He had not noticed the start Neil Darroch gave the moment he caught sight of the girl, nor did he perceive that his companion's agitation and half incredulous stare were both present before he whispered in his ear.

Neil, indeed, scarcely heard him. This strange meeting with the woman he had tried to forget, who was in a way the cause of all his troubles, affected him powerfully. He had despaired of ever seeing her again; he had resolved to make no effort to find her. How could he, a man who bore on his back the brand of ignominy, venture to approach her? Over and over again he repeated this argument to himself, but every time his mind would conjure up a vision of her as he had last seen her, talking to poor old Charles Deschamps, laughing gaily at some gallant speech of her ancient admirer. How could he, broken in spirit, with no future, ruined, a mere outcast, ever raise his eyes to one who was rich both in charms and beauty, and in this world's goods? he asked himself, but could not forget her face and figure and the dainty drawl of her sweet voice.

And now she was before him upon a theatre stage—a common actress. Could this indeed be she—this woman who sang entrancingly, to whom the whole house was listening with bated breath? A feeling of intense relief possessed him when he found that there was nothing objectionable in the words she voiced. She broke into a dance, modest and graceful, swaying to the music, nodding and smiling to her audience,

even as she had many a time nodded and smiled to him; and then she vanished at the wings.

A storm of cheering recalled her, but only to curtsey and beam with pleasure. Neil found himself, quite unconsciously, joining in the ovation, and discovered Jules Gironde with a suspicious moisture in his eyes.

'Think of her!' said the little Gascon in a snuffling voice. 'It is as they told me: she is like a lark and a humming-bird rolled into one, and the spirit of a viper is inside. Why, my friend, are the worst women often the fairest?'

His words recalled Neil to himself. He must be cautious and circumspect.

'I cannot say I see anything very bad in her,' he answered.

'No, no, but wait; you heard what I said. She comes again; then you will see what I mean.'

He was right. She appeared for the second time in character, in the costume of a vivandière of the line, and her dress brought vividly to Neil's mind the spotted kerchief, the short skirt and the red stockings she had worn at Darroch House. She played her part to perfection, slapping an imaginary veteran on the face, chaffing a raw recruit, gently tending a dying conscript. The house laughed with her and cried with her. Never for a moment had Neil Darroch supposed that she possessed such talent.

But why, in any case, was she here? What did her appearance in this public place mean? Was she now poor, or was it——? But as he cudgelled his brains for an answer her acting ceased.

There was a dead silence, and from the roof were lowered two standards, each surmounted by the imperial eagle. The house restrained itself by a mighty effort, and, accompanied by the full orchestra, she sang again. The glory of Napoleon was her theme. Her voice, now rich and full, told of the old campaigns and the old triumphs. It quavered into

melancholy notes and recounted the fall of the Empire; it rose vigorous and strong, denouncing the Bourbons, the tyrants, the curse of France; it was hushed into expectancy, and then, little by little, pealed out into a pæan of victory, telling of the great march and the flocking to the colours, and the trust of the Old Guard, and finally ended in a jubilation and a prophecy of peace with honour.

The song itself was mere clap-trap, but the woman threw feeling and passion into it. One would have sworn she was the Emperor's devoted slave, that in her heart she echoed every word to which she gave utterance, every sentiment she expressed. As she ceased she kissed the flags, which were represented as riddled with shot and scorched with flame. Then, raising them, she looked upwards, as if praying for a blessing on the cause they represented.

The effect was marvellous. Neil himself was moved. Gironde was in a state of mad enthusiasm. Tears were rolling down war-worn faces, hoarse voices were trying to shout, though half-choked by sobs; bearded men were hugging each other, beardless boys were flushed as though with wine.

A moment so, and then, as the curtain fell, every sound was lost in a mighty roar like that raised by an army on the field of battle. No words could be heard, nothing but a volume of rolling sound, yet Neil Darroch understood its import, dazed and bewildered though he was, and, carried away for the moment, shouted also with the rest:

'Vive l'Empereur!'

As they mingled with the press on the way out, Jules caught hold of Neil's arm.

'Do you know what she is?' he whispered.

'What she is?' echoed Neil, on the point of revealing his secret.

'She is Fouché in petticoats. I could no more arrest her on the stage than I could arrest the Orator in the Cabinet. She would prove me a liar to my

face. Hush!' he added warningly. 'Yonder is number one.'

Neil followed the direction of his gaze, and there, head and shoulders above the crowd, his chin and mouth concealed, a rapt look in his dark eyes, was the assassin, Carlo Massoni.

Neil would there and then have forced his way through the throng and grappled with the villain, had not Gironde restrained him.

'Gently, my friend,' he whispered; 'all in good time. You would scare the other birds, and do no good, for where are your proofs?'

'True, and where are your proofs about—about the girl's guilt?' asked Neil.

'Here at present,' said Jules, tapping his head; 'but it is dangerous to speak so loud.'

Neil felt himself in a quandary. He did not know what to believe. He reflected how short had been his acquaintance with Kate Ingleby; he could not tell to what influences she had been subjected in Paris; he knew nothing of her uncle or her uncle's friends. Was it possible she could be so vile?

'No, no,' he cried to himself, 'it cannot be;' but then again his own question would crop up: 'Where are your proofs?'

Guilty or not guilty, he determined to save her from the clutches of the law. If she had indeed fallen so low in so short a time, it could not be her fault altogether. She must have unwittingly got into the power of villains, of this Massoni, perhaps, or maybe her uncle, D'Herbois, had been a scoundrel.

He must deceive Gironde, that was evident. It would serve no purpose to frankly tell him everything, for it would make no difference to the Gascon's course of action.

It will be noted that Neil could not absolutely convince himself of the girl's innocence. His trials had made him suspicious, he had lost faith in human nature.

Still he became an habitual frequenter of the theatre, aware that there was little risk of his being recognised, so altered were his features by illness, so changed his expression. His one pleasure in life was to sit and watch her, to listen to her clear young voice, to let his thoughts wander back to the past and recall the old scenes at Darroch. It often seemed to him as though she sang to the music of the Western waves as they splashed and played upon the sands of Shiachan, or came tumbling, white and frothy, about the Croban Point.

He would lose himself in a reverie and be roused only when the house rose in mad enthusiasm at the song of the Emperor. Then he would stagger out into the night and torture himself with questions.

It was not without a fierce struggle that he made up his mind. He long halted between his love for Kate Ingleby and his friendship for Gironde. He knew how the latter looked forward to the great haul he was going to make, how he counted upon it to re-establish his fame as the most cunning and adroit member of the secret service, how he hoped to show by it his devotion to his Emperor, his zeal for the re-established Empire.

If it is hard for a youth with all his life before him to have his ambitions thwarted, how much greater is the blow to a man of middle age, striving to regain a position he has lost!

Neil fully appreciated this; he feared that his comrade would think he had merely forestalled him, that he was jealous and greedy for advancement, for be it observed that he had to anticipate the Gascon. At the same time as he warned Kate Ingleby he would have to kill or capture her fellow-conspirators. If she fled they would at once take the alarm. There must be no bungling. There would be no little danger, for he must do the deed alone. It would be fatal to have witnesses.

So great was the conflict he waged with himself,

that it was not till the evening of the great concert in the garden of the Tuileries, the night following the famous Champs de Mai, that he finally resolved to put into execution the plan he had been so long maturing. He was in an excellent position to gain information, and what he heard still further distressed him. The girl lived in the same house with the villain Massoni, a deformed creature, and—here was his one crumb of comfort—an old female servant, who had been there while Emile d'Herbois lived. Be it remembered neither he nor Gironde knew aught of Charles Deschamps, who, little better than a helpless infant, lay hidden away in an inner room. How, then, could Neil understand what kept the girl in such vile, such loathsome company?

He knew the house which all three inhabited, the rambling building in the narrow lane near the river, and within the boundaries of the old Quartier St. Paul. He knew also that Gironde was to arrest the whole band at midnight on the Monday following the great fête and presentation of the eagles on the Champs de Mars.

Neil Darroch made up his mind to carry out his project on the preceding night. Gironde considered Fouché too powerful to proclaim him as a traitor, and worse than a traitor; but he was bent on capturing the others, and had left them no loophole of escape, not even that devised for the girl by Neil Darroch. For the spy had not been blind: he quietly altered his plans: he also resolved to visit the house off the Rue de Gramont on the night of Sunday, June 4.

There were two differences in their methods of setting to work, and this was unknown to the Gascon. Neil Darroch had to go alone, and he considered it best to go when the house was vacant. Jules Gironde was to have men at his back, and to wait till the birds were in the trap.

Neil Darroch's chief concern was to explain his

conduct to the man who had trusted and loved him; Jules Gironde's to explain to his followers the conduct of the man he pitied and understood.

For all that, he did not know that Noël Deschamps and the actress had met before, that she was the woman who, in some measure, was the cause of the story he had heard in Corsica. He merely thought that his friend was fascinated by 'la belle Americaine,' and being a man with a big heart, he did not blame him. Instead, he was sincerely sorry to find himself in such an awkward position; but duty was duty, and 'the Emperor,' so said the Gascon, 'must come first.' Jules Gironde would have arrested his mother had he believed her dangerous to the object of his hero-worship.

It was a very miserable man who excused himself on a plea of illness from going to the Tuileries, and, as soon as Gironde departed, prepared a dark lantern, cleaned and loaded a brace of pistols, and saw that a long knife could be slipped readily from its sheath. The venture was perilous. Nothing must be left to chance.

He had explored the neighbourhood of the house, and discovered a window in the back, to which access could be obtained by means of an outhouse roof.

Gironde's agents had brought in the news that Massoni and the woman were to be at the palace, and that Craspinat, the third of the party, was to join them after the display of fireworks, and return home with them.

The Gascon had only waited so long because he wished to excite in his victims a false sense of security, and he knew that the bomb which was to be their instrument for Napoleon's assassination was yet hardly completed. He had learned a good deal more about Craspinat, and no longer regarded that repulsive being as a mere tool in the hands of Massoni.

Had Gironde conceived that Neil Darroch would lie in wait at the house off the Rue de Gramont, he would at once have again altered his plans; but as he expected to arrive immediately after his victims, and as he had given orders for men to be posted about the house an hour before midnight, he felt certain that he would frustrate Neil Darroch's purpose and carry out his own. The old Jules Gironde would have been more careful, but five years of solitude amongst the mountains of Corsica had left their mark on the faithful Gascon; for once his strategy was at fault.

Neil Darroch found himself so feverish and restless that he set out sooner than he had intended. It will be remembered that he was ignorant of the alteration in Gironde's plan. He himself was to have taken part in the surprise on the morrow.

He experienced no difficulty in carrying out his intentions. The ill-lighted streets were deserted. All Paris seemed to be at the concert and pyrotechnic display. The night was clear and warm. The man, hurrying along in the shadows, started at the sound of his own footsteps; his head was throbbing, his eyes wild. Worry and passion had told their tale on him. He was a mere mockery of the man who, little more than a year before, had saved the girl he was again trying to save; and yet the same traits were present in him—a cool courage, a certain degree of doggedness, and a morbid sensitiveness; but in addition there were the fruits of undeserved cruelty, illness, and the cherished desire for revenge.

It was an hour and a half before the first of Gironde's gendarmes posted himself where he could command the back of the house that Neil Darroch mounted on the sloping roof of the shed and tried the window. Somewhat to his surprise, it was not fastened. He knew that just then the only occupant of the house, the old servant, was no doubt already asleep.

His knowledge, like Gironde's, was, as we have seen, defective. The Gascon was aware that Massoni had only recently made the house his abode, and this he regarded as a sign that matters were approaching a crisis.

Neil Darroch clambered in, and, gently closing the window, began to look about him with the aid of the lantern. He found that he was in a large chamber, half sitting-room, half bedroom. A table stood in the centre, but there was little furniture besides, with the exception of a canopied bed and a few chairs. There was a candle upon the mantelshelf, and Neil, after hesitating a moment, lit it and surveyed the premises. It was clearly a woman's room. Whose, then, but Kate Ingleby's? Suddenly he caught sight of something lying on a shelf which projected from the wall and formed a makeshift dressing-table. It was a little brooch of gold, which had been his mother's, and which he had one day presented to the girl when she had been in difficulties about the fastening of her dress at the throat. He picked it up and fingered it curiously. What a host of memories it brought back to him! He smiled as he replaced it, and his smile was less grim than it had been for many a day.

'Yes,' he muttered, 'I did right in coming here. Poor lass! she may not be so much to blame as one would think. God knows how hard it is for some to guard themselves from crime.'

He passed his hand across his brow. His head ached; he did not feel equal to the task which might be before him. So far, however, fortune had once in a way favoured him. It might now be possible for him to warn the girl without alarming the others. Together they might devise some plan of escape for her if she would abandon the conspiracy.

At the same time, he recognised that he was in an invidious position. He had the feelings of a gentleman, and disliked having thus to intrude on any

woman's privacy, but it was no time for false modesty, and so, when he discovered a closet filled with clothes, but large enough to accommodate him, and even to permit his standing upright, he resolved to conceal himself. He carefully extinguished the candle, and making himself as comfortable as possible in the recess, pulled the door to until only a chink remained, and seeing that his pistols were easy in his belt, began his vigil. The time passed wearily; there was not a sound in the building, not even the monotonous tick of a clock to tell how the minutes sped. His thoughts went flying back again to Darroch House. He remembered with a faint surprise the kind of man he had then been, the finicking, cold-mannered advocate, who fumbled with his eyeglass, made neat little speeches, and was the better pleased if they happened to be cynical; who was full of family pride and passionately patriotic, however slightly he might show his sentiments, and yet whose cool, legal brain had been turned by a fair lass with wonderful eyes and hair, a mixed ancestry, and a Yankee drawl.

'And yet,' he said to himself, 'this passion is all that remains to me.'

It was not strictly true.

A moment later he was thinking of Geoffrey, of the foul-mouthed, drunken Londoner who was to blame for all his miseries, for those scars upon his back, for his broken health, for—yes, it was probable—for the girl's present position.

'Let me but meet him!' he muttered. The slumbering fires of hate still glowed within him. 'He shall have his chance, though he deserves to die like the dog he is; but I am not an assassin. I shall give him his chance.' He stopped, and listened intently.

A sound like the distant closing of a door had come to his ears. He waited impatiently. Every second seemed an hour in his state of nervous tension. He was beginning to think his senses had deceived him, when he heard a light footstep, and then was

conscious of a faint yellow gleam visible through the chink. He held his breath and waited, pushing the press-door a little further ajar. A figure, carrying a light, passed across his line of vision, the figure of a woman. It was Kate Ingleby.

At the same moment he distinctly heard the snarling whine of a street cur. Though he did not know it, Gironde's spies were signalling that there was a glow at the back of the house, but they were signalling a trifle too soon. The Gascon and his band of men were not yet on the spot. If the spy had not outwitted the Minister of Police, they would not even have been upon their way; but Gironde had been too clever for Fouché. He was late, but he was coming. Had he not changed his plans, there would have been no midnight raid on the morrow; but Fouché had taken alarm only at the last moment, and had to be careful how he opposed the man who had thwarted him more than once. The Orator was not the person to run his head into a noose or forge evidence against himself. His attempt had been hurried and incomplete.

Neil Darroch, unaware that he had not a moment to lose, was yet conscious that there must be no delay. As soon, therefore, as Kate passed his hiding-place, he slipped quietly out. She was pulling down the window-blind, but turned sharply as she heard him.

He held up a warning hand, but not in time to check the cry of surprise and fear she uttered as she saw the tall stranger standing at the table.

She had thrown aside her hat, and was robed in a long cloak, a fold of which she clutched with the fingers of her left hand, while her right began to search her dress.

Neil understood the motion. She was seeking a weapon.

'You need not be afraid,' he said in French. 'I will do you no harm.'

Now that he was close to her, he saw that a year

had changed her also. She was thinner and paler; her face was a little careworn; she looked older and more of a woman than she had done. Her girlish brightness was gone in large measure, but to him she was more beautiful than ever. Trouble had refined her, while it had hardened him, but her eyes were the same, with the old defiant flash in them, though now along with it there was something of wonder, something of fear.

'Who are you?' she asked. 'What do you want?'

'It matters not who I am. I want to see you safe. You must leave Paris to-night; to-morrow will be too late.'

'Leave Paris!'

It was plain she was utterly bewildered. Suddenly her manner changed.

'Is there anything else you have to propose to me?' she queried. 'Do you intend to accompany me, for instance?'

'I entertained no such idea,' he answered.

Something in his bearing, in his words, startled her.

She clutched at the table and leaned forward, scanning his features, and then gave a little cry, the meaning of which he could not doubt. It expressed relief—ay, and more than relief. It was the cry of one who has waited long, who has hoped and watched, and has at last been rewarded.

'It is you!' she said softly. 'Ah, I knew you would come!' A smile dimpled her face. 'Now,' she added, with a pretty gesture of her hands, 'I am not afraid.'

Neil Darroch trembled as he had never done, even when stripped and ready for the lash; but he resolved to test her.

'Have done!' he said sternly. 'I am here for your sake. Do you think you can fool me as you fool these mad enthusiasts?'

'Fool you!' she repeated, all the glow fading from

her face. 'What do you mean? What has happened?'

Her surprise was too real to be feigned.

'Then, you do not know—you are not guilty?' he said hoarsely. 'For God's sake, Miss Ingleby—Kate—tell me if you have any dealings with this man Massoni!'

'With Signor Massoni! dealings! How dare you?' she cried.

Then suddenly she covered her face, and began to sob bitterly.

'You mistake my meaning,' said Neil, striving hard to steady his voice. 'I mean, are you concerned in this plot of his and the man Craspinat?'

The most intense astonishment checked her grief, though she could not control her agitation.

'A plot!' she stammered, 'I know nothing of a plot. And who is Craspinat?'

It was his turn to be astounded. He knew her to be far too clever to overact a part, and yet——

'Craspinat, the deformed being, the inventor of the bomb, who lives in this house, and has done so for months.'

'Are you mad?' she asked.

'God knows!' said Neil, passing his hand across his forehead.

'Tell me,' she cried softly, catching at his arm—'tell me all. There is some terrible mystery here.'

In a few hurried words he made it clear to her. She listened, her amazement growing with his narration.

He finished at last, and marvelled to see how calmly she took the news; but her next words thrilled him.

'And knowing all this, knowing the danger you run, even though you thought me wicked'—he made a sign of dissent, but she never paused—'you yet came to warn me?'

'I could not help it,' he said.

'I suppose,' she asked, with just a suspicion of her old archness and raillery—'I suppose it was entirely unintentional?'

'Kate!' was all he said.

Somehow he found himself at her side, his arm about her, her eyes smiling into his, and then he came to himself.

'No, no,' he said harshly, 'it cannot be. I am unworthy; I am marked like a felon. I have no hope, no country, no God!'

She shrank back, alarmed at his violence.

'But you must leave at once,' he said, mastering himself.

'I cannot,' she cried. 'There is your uncle—he is dying.'

'My uncle!'

'Yes, Monsieur Deschamps.'

And then she told him.

'But,' said he, 'what of Massoni?'

'It is only recently I have begun to suspect him,' she said. 'I have told you how I found I was poor, how I had to go upon the stage, and it was after that he came. He represented himself as an old friend of Monsieur d'Herbois, and Victorine said it was so. He was very pleasant, and would have helped me with money had I let him.'

'The devil!' exclaimed Neil.

'Then he said he had to leave his lodgings, and could find no others, and offered to pay me board. I refused, but a week ago he came of his own accord, and since then I have feared him and carried a weapon. I could not leave Monsieur Deschamps, and Victorine was always with me; but I have been in misery. To-night he forced me to go to the Tuileries, but I slipped away when he was busy talking to one who, from what you say, must have been this terrible Craspinat, and who must also have made Monsieur Deschamps what he is. I have no friends; I have quarrelled with the notary, and was too

proud—— Ah, you do not know how hard it was for me!'

'Ay,' said Neil grimly, 'and it shall go hard with him!'

'Hush!' she whispered.

There was the sound of heavy footsteps upon the creaking stairs.

'Who is it?' asked Neil Darroch quietly.

'It is Massoni; he has come back! He——'

She gave a cry of alarm as there came a rapping on the panels.

'Hide!' she whispered, pointing towards the closet.

Neil Darroch paid no attention. A few strides on tiptoe carried him to the door. The key, he noticed, was on the inside, but it was not locked.

A moment later it was flung back on his face and a man entered hurriedly.

Then Neil Darroch quietly shut the door, and shot to the bolt, putting the key in his pocket.

He turned immediately, and found himself face to face with Carlo Massoni.

'Who the devil are you?' asked the latter. 'If this is one of your *friends*,' he added with a sneer, turning to the girl, 'he has come at a very inconvenient time.'

'By no means,' said Neil; 'nothing could have suited better.'

'Sacré!' hissed Massoni; 'it is you, is it?'

'Yes, it is I,' replied Neil Darroch in a strained, unnatural voice.

For a moment he had entirely forgotten his mission. The extraordinary story he had just heard, the thought of what this Massoni had done, of what Monsieur Deschamps had become, of the risks the girl had run, the insults she had suffered, had maddened him. The sight of Massoni in her room, his sneering words, goaded him to fury, but he was deadly calm. His was the most dangerous form of passion.

'You appear surprised,' he went on; 'but I am not a man who readily forgets.'

'Curse you!' said Massoni, 'my memory is as good as yours.'

'Pardon me, but you do not understand, and there is no time to explain.'

'Look here,' said Massoni, 'you seem to be mad; but, mad or not, I shall meet you later where and when you will. At present, let me tell you, the odds are too great.'

'There are no odds,' said Neil Darroch. 'I am exactly in the same position as yourself. If you are found here alive, you are arrested as a conspirator. If I am found, I am arrested as an accomplice. Things could not be fairer. You have no second, neither have I; there is, however, a third party who can give the word to fire. I regret the choice of weapons is limited; but you have a brace of pistols, so have I. No, sir!' he thundered suddenly, 'drop your hand, or I shall shoot you as you deserve to be shot! That is better,' he went on, in his former level tones. 'I have waited long for this; the table alone shall separate us—the length of the table.'

'It is murder!' cried the Corsican, staggered at this man's knowledge of his affairs.

'You will kindly call for ends,' said Neil Darroch, producing a coin and balancing it on his thumb-nail.

'I say it is murder!' said Massoni again.

'By no means. It is, shall we say, an appeal to chance—a favourite occupation of yours, if I have heard aright. As you appear to object, I shall spin the coin. I regret the necessity of catching it; but I know you too well to let it fall on the floor and necessitate my stooping. You are dealing with a gentleman, however, even though his back has been torn by the cat. Heads! I have won. Fortune seems against you to-night. I shall stand with my back to the window. Oblige me by taking up your position with your back to the door. I am sorry to

have again to threaten you. Thank you. The light, I think, favours neither side.'

As Neil Darroch spoke, he walked past Carlo Massoni, turning round immediately so that he faced him, and paced backwards till he stood at the other end of the table.

'This, sir,' said he, 'is not a duel; it is an appeal to God. I had reason to doubt if such a Being existed; but now I know He does. I regret this scene should take place in the presence of any woman, but it is necessary. You will kindly count three in French, and in a loud voice,' he added, never taking his eyes off the other's face, but addressing the girl, who all this time had been standing with parted lips, staring from one to the other, unable to stir or utter a sound, fascinated by what was passing before her. 'You will lay one of your pistols on the table, sir, as I do, for a second shot, to be fired immediately after the first. I may tell you I believe you will fall at the first discharge, and so a second will not be required; but it is well to be prepared. Do you agree?'

'You are mad!' said the Corsican, in a hoarse voice, as he saw the pale, set face of the man a few feet in front of him, a man whose eyes glowed with a strange fire.

'Do you agree?'

'Sacré, yes! One may as well be shot as hanged; but you shall go with me.'

'Then lay your second pistol on the table. Ah!'

Neil Darroch had seen Massoni's gaze shift from his face. He was still looking in his direction, but beyond him. At the same moment there came a noise from behind him, and a cry from Kate Ingleby. Something was happening at the window, and not at the window only. All at once the house resounded with shouts and cries; in rapid succession there came the clatter of feet upon the stairs, and then a thundering of fists upon the door, while a voice roared:

'Open, in the name of the Emperor!'

"This sir," said he, "is not a duel: it is an appeal to God."

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The summons mingled with the report of a pistol and a heavy fall.

Neil Darroch, the instant he realized that the window was being forced, sprang quickly to one side. He had a glimpse, and a glimpse only, of a face, blood-stained and ferocious, covered with shaggy hair, and carrying a long knife between its teeth. It was like the head of some hideous insect, of some huge deformed spider, a face which might have been—and indeed was in some measure—the product of those terrible days when the guillotine was red to the frame and blunted with excess of work, the days of the tumbril and the basket, the days which had vanished more quickly than they had begun, and had carried to ruin even those who gloried in them. The creature who owned it had pushed up the sash, and was bundling over the sill—a creature short and twisted, clad in man's clothes, but like nothing human.

It was Craspinat, the bomb-maker, who, in attempting to escape, had been surrounded and turned back by the cordon which the cautious Gascon had placed round the house.

It has taken a brief space again to describe her as she came crawling into the light from the darkness without, but Neil saw her face as her life had made it for an instant only. Almost as he leapt aside Massoni's pistol rang out, a knife tinkled on the boards, and the face of Craspinat was no longer a face—nothing but a broadening smear of crimson, a ghastly patch fringed by shaggy hair, which in parts had dropped away—a patch which seemed to quiver and pulsate, and then vanished as the creature pitched forward, a corpse, upon the floor.

The curl of the smoke had not drifted from the pistol's muzzle when, with a crack of metal and a splintering of wood, the door gave way, and Jules Gironde, with half a dozen men at his back, burst into the room. The Gascon took in the situation at

a glance. There was a tall man with his back to him covering Neil Darroch with a pistol, therefore that man, Carlo Massoni, the Corsican, must die. Gironde, quick as lightning, pitched up his weapon and crooked his forefinger. Two reports, one following the other as if it were its echo, resounded through the room, and yet Massoni had not again fired.

Neil Darroch, bewildered for a moment, had taken in the meaning of what was passing a second later than Gironde. He also levelled his pistol at the Corsican, aiming low and sure; but even as his finger tightened on the trigger, he perceived what would happen, yet could not check his fire.

The pistol exploded, and Neil Darroch, from his corner, saw two men fall. The first was Massoni, who jerked up his head, threw out his arms, and crashed out at full length upon his back. The second was Gironde, who collapsed in a heap, and then rose upon his knees and hobbled forward upon them till he could clutch the table-edge. His eyes were starting from his head, a ruddy stream began to trickle over his lower lip and course down his chin.

With a cry of agony Neil Darroch ran towards him, while no one else stirred except Massoni, whose legs were twitching like those of a pithed frog in contact with vinegar paper.

But the Gascon was past all help. His head drooped, he grew limp, as if dead, and then suddenly he roused himself. He gathered his short legs beneath him, and struggled up on his feet, a gleam in his faded eyes, a look on his face which Neil Darroch knew, which he had seen upon the brig *Inconstant* when Jules Gironde met his master after five weary, suffering years. Very waveringly his hand went up to the salute. It never reached his forehead. It fell for the last time as his lips moved.

Neil Darroch alone heard his dying whisper—a whisper stifled by a fresh gush from between his feebly moving lips.

'Pour l'Empereur!' gasped Jules Gironde, and sank down across the table.

It was, perhaps, as well, for what would the faithful Gascon have said to the *sauve qui peut* of Buonaparte's last battle?

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE DAY OF BATTLE

GIRONDE was dead, Massoni was dead, Craspinat was dead, but a man was sitting in the corner of a cell of the Temple, a prison set apart for State offenders and criminals of the higher class. In several ways he was remarkable. His great height was apparent even as he sat, bowed upon a small bench; he was young, powerful, and his face was distinctly handsome, his features clear-cut and refined. But what would specially have struck an observer was his expression. It was that of a man who has been dazed and has not yet recovered, whose senses are under a cloud. It was not the vacant look of utter idiocy, neither was it the besotted, wandering, shiftless aspect of the chronic drunkard; it was something between the two—a kind of facial mask. The mental powers which go to make a vigorous, healthy mind were present, but they were in abeyance. His brain-cells were normal, but their action was sluggish, their stream of energy feeble, and coursing only in certain broad channels. This man could eat and drink, could understand what was said to him, and answer coherently, but without evincing any interest in the subject. His memory was dulled, but not quite gone. Now and then he passed his hand wearily across his forehead, and his face grew pained in his effort to recall what was just then a blank. Otherwise he was singularly impassive, and apparently contented with his bed of

straw and his meagre fare. His gaoler understood him; for the turnkey had seen dainty women of the aristocracy with just such a look upon their poor wan faces, due to a variety of causes, any one of which would have been sufficient to shake the best-balanced brain.

He knew that his prisoner was in a condition where liberties might be safely taken with him; he might be cuffed and kicked and sworn at with impunity; but the gaoler was a kindly man, if somewhat rough-tongued, and did not make the most of his opportunities.

Now he was glad he had not done so, for that morning he had received certain orders respecting his captive which, while they considerably astonished him, left him no option but to obey. They came from the Duke of Otranto, and commanded the release of Noël Deschamps, and his transference to the care of a certain Sergeant Vichery, and this but two days after his admission on a serious charge of conspiring against the Emperor's life.

But Fouché was cunning. Even as David placed Uriah the Hittite in the forefront of the battle, and hoped to hear the last of him, so Fouché, on learning the condition into which the tragedy of the house in the Rue de Gramont had cast his prisoner, and knowing that he had been intimate with Gironde, considered it expedient to hurry him off to a place where he certainly could do no harm, and might do good by deserting or being put *hors de combat.* It was his surest course.

Sergeant Vichery appeared in due course, an old campaigner, with a fine grog-blossom of a nose, and a moustache whose spiked ends might have served as bayonets at close quarters.

He was delighted with the proportions of his latest recruit, and as he was kept in ignorance of his mental condition, it was some time before he came to the conclusion that this great grenadier of a fellow

was a fool of a man, and a greater fool of a soldier. His little company, half conscripts, half veterans, were well on their way to Avesnes ere he discovered that some of Deschamps's brains were missing. By that time, however, he had discovered something else—that this stolid, impassive mortal, who at a dozen yards looked the beau-ideal of a guardsman, had the skin of his back dotted and striped like that of a galley-slave.

Jacques Vichery imagined a tragedy, and became sympathetic. Truth to tell, his own back was not as smooth as it might have been. Sergeant Vichery as a private had been an inveterate looter, and should have been shot long ago.

So he made things easy for Neil Darroch, who trudged along in his shako, his tailed tunic and his gaiters, white with June dust from top to toe, in as great a haze outwardly as inwardly.

He answered his comrades in monosyllables, he never spoke except when questioned, he did nothing of his own initiative. He was a mere automaton; but as Jacques Vichery said:

'I've seen them so. Wait till we get at the fat Prussians or the red-coats, and then watch our pretty sleeper. He'll wake up with a vengeance, and even if he don't, he's as good food for powder and shot as any of you chatterers. We don't want him for a sentry, and he can hit a barn-door as well as some of your precious clodhoppers. My faith! he could lunge with a bayonet. See him smile! He has more wits than we think.' And the sergeant patted his especial protégé on the cheek as though he had been a baby.

There was plenty to interest Neil, had he been in a fit state to appreciate it. The summer was glorious, the grass lush and green, the crops heavy. From every road, as they approached the frontier, came the stirring quick march of drum and fife, the merry rattle and the lively tootling sounding between the thick beech-hedges, and broken now and then by the

throaty bugle music or the quick chorus of a marching song.

Cavalry clattered past, artillery rumbled and rattled through sleepy villages, watched from the cottage-doors by bright-eyed children, who were yet to tell their sons and daughters how they had seen the gathering of the last grand army of France.

Vichery's little company belonged to a regiment in the division commanded by the Baron Marcognet, which formed part of the Corps d'Erlon. This first Corps d'Armée had been stationed at Lille, but had now, along with the others, concentrated upon the Sambre.

Sergeant Vichery was late in joining—had, indeed, been kept in Paris on a special mission. He was to collect some thirty men who were on leave and hurry them to the front, and in the meantime he had not been idle. A dozen stout fellows had found fighting Jacques's tongue so persuasive, and the glories of the coming campaign so enticing, that they had, after a heavy supper, vowed to follow the gallant sergeant anywhere he might choose to lead them, so long as they got a chance at the hated Prussians, and 'those unknown devils of Englishmen who had been so lucky in the Peninsula—confound their ugly faces!'

It was a very proud old sergeant, with a very fiery nose, who marched his comrades and his recruits into quarters at Solre-sur-Sambre, where lay over forty thousand of what poor Jules Gironde would have styled 'the finest infantry on earth.'

Neil Darroch passed almost unnoticed. The surgeon did not trouble him, and the soldiers were too busy to take an interest in this new conscript, who had no business to be there at all, and who had not a sou in his pouch.

Old Vichery was a favourite, and his officers only laughed at his 'chickens,' as they called his recruits, and told the sergeant to turn them out efficient in a couple of days, which terrible task the smiling

Jacques undertook with the greatest delight, and Vichery's 'chickens' had no rest, morning, noon, or night.

It was on June 14 that the Emperor issued his last appeal to as fine an army as he had ever placed in the field. Well might it stir his veterans! Well might it be received with unbounded enthusiasm, and excite the highest hopes!

'Soldiers,' it ran, 'this day is the anniversary of Marengo and of Friedland, which twice decided the destiny of Europe. Then, as after Austerlitz, as after Wagram, we were too generous. We believed in the protestations and in the oaths of princes whom we left on their thrones. Now, however, leagued together, they aim at the independence and the most sacred rights of France. They have commenced the most unjust of aggressions. Let us, then, march to meet them. Are they and we no longer the same men?

'Soldiers, at Jena, against these same Prussians, now so arrogant, you were one to three, and at Montmirail one to six! Let those among you who have been captives to the English describe the nature of their prison-ships, and the frightful miseries they endured.

'The Saxons, the Belgians, the Hanoverians, the soldiers of the Confederation of the Rhine, lament that they are compelled to use their arms in the cause of the princes, the enemies of justice and of the rights of all nations. They know that this coalition is insatiable. After having devoured twelve millions of Poles, twelve millions of Italians, one million of Saxons, and six millions of Belgians, it now wishes to devour the States of the second rank in Germany.

'Madmen! one moment of prosperity has bewildered them. The oppression and the humiliation of the French people are beyond their power. If they enter France they will find their grave.

'Soldiers, we have forced marches to make, battles

to fight, dangers to encounter, but with firmness victory will be ours! The rights, the honour, and the happiness of the country will be recovered!

'To every Frenchman who has a heart the moment has now arrived to conquer or to die!'

Had Neil Darroch been in a condition to understand it, one clause must surely have struck him, one in which there was no note of triumph, no conjuring up of past glories, nothing but an inciting to revenge, an appeal to the baser passions.

Of all the nations across which the shadow of Napoleon Buonaparte had fallen, one alone had been able to utterly defy him, had never been trampled under foot. The children of the sea kings alone had not bowed the knee to Baal.

On the morning of the day following the march began, and in the dull gray light of a balmy summer's dawn the French left column came in contact with the Prussians, and the boom of cannon told that the campaign had commenced. All that day Neil Darroch marched in the rear of his division. He saw nothing of the fighting in front of him, of the gallant stand of the Westphalian Landwehr and their bloody defeat, of the fierce charge of the French cavalry on Woisky's dragoons. He merely trudged along untiringly, to all appearance unmoved by the sounds of war which struck upon his unaccustomed ears. His nearest comrades gave him up in despair; they could not get a word out of this phlegmatic mortal, who smiled peaceably upon them, and seemed in a dream.

'A touch of the sun or a touch of the heart,' said the one to the other, nudging his fellow and pointing to Neil, as, tired and dusty, they settled to their soup and bread in the bivouac at Marchienne au Pont.

They were still more tired and still more dusty, and not a little disgusted at their next bivouac; for it was nine o'clock in the evening of the 16th that

the Corps d'Erlon encamped in the rear of Ney's position, to the south of the heights of Frasne.

All day long the division had marched and countermarched, and a battle had been lost because of them. Hurrying to join Ney, who was in sore need of reinforcements, they had been checked and hurried away towards Ligny, where was waging an heroic struggle. Scarcely had they come in sight of Fleurus, when once again their advance had been interrupted, and they had swung back towards Quatre Bras, where the rye-fields were soaked with the blood of gallant men, the ditches lined with dead, the wood of Bossu full of wounded, who sought a shelter in its depths from the dread artillery fire and the thundering charge of horse.

It was night, and the British and their allies held the stricken field. All that French daring and French valour could do had been done that day, but they had been met by that coolness and dogged resolve which is the glory of the men in red. The squares, those grim, fire-encircled squares, had stood firm. Cuirassiers and lancers had rolled in successive waves upon them, had even broken through to their centre, but had melted away, and rolled back before their volleys and their bayonets. Surely a fitting prelude to the final struggle! It was night, but there was not as yet that dead stillness which was to reign over both camps. The surgeons were busy, the wounded were being carried to the rear, the fires were twinkling in long lines in the valley and upon the heights.

Gradually the voices ceased, the sleep of exhaustion spread from one to another, coming to the wearied marcher and the wearied fighter. The distant echo of trampling hoofs alone broke the silence as the allied cavalry joined their comrades.

Suddenly another sound rose upon the night air. Softened by distance, it floated to the French lines as a low wailing music, weird and melancholy, a

strange, wild, tremulous sobbing, its sonorous bray and harsh war-like notes mellowed, its droning and its skirl mingled and dying away in a plaintive call like the lonely cry of a shore bird quavering out into the darkness.

A piper of the Black Watch was playing a lament for his kilted lads who lay amongst the down-trodden, blood-soaked, heavy-eared rye, and would never again listen to drone and chanter.

It ceased as suddenly as it began. A sleepy officer had ordered him to keep quiet, and yet without an oath, for the burly piper had great tears stealing down his cheeks, and the officer knew it, and knew the mournful dirge of the broken clan.

But elsewhere as the first notes stole out upon the night air, a man started up from the knapsack which served him for a pillow and listened with straining ears and bated breath. What was this he heard? He could not understand, but a fierce restlessness fastened upon him. Something called him, was calling him impatiently, he could not stay. Ere the sound died away he was crawling on his hands and knees with his face towards the north. On and on, past men slumbering heavily, picking his way cunningly as a cat, warily halting, sinking to earth, on and on till he was out in the open, and then again amongst sleeping forms grouped in fantastic attitudes round the flickering wood fires. He was in danger, and he seemed to know it, for he grew more and more cautious, waiting for longer intervals, taking advantage of every bush and every little mound. Men stirred and he lay like a log, they snored and he glided past them.

There was something animal-like in his stealthy movements. It was a mere instinct which guided him. Now and then a soldier would start up crying loudly in his sleep, his brain busy with what had passed, but his comrades, rising on their elbows to curse him, saw nothing to cause them alarm.

Neither did the sentry, for lean fingers gripped his throat from behind and a blackness came over him, while a stooping figure crept down the slope without a sound.

The man was away on the right of the French position, far to the east of the Charleroi road, and once clear of the lines, he halted.

There was no longer any sound. He listened intently, and then swept his hand across his forehead. The act had become mechanical. He did not know what he was doing, why he was here, who or what he was. He felt tired, and lay down upon the bare earth like a brute beast.

An hour before daybreak he was roused again, this time by heavy firing. He stared dully about him, and then, breaking into a run, went swiftly towards it. It was merely an affair of picquets, beginning at Piermont; but it spread rapidly, till the whole face of each line was engaged. It soon ended, once the cause, a straying cavalry patrol, had been discovered. But by that time the man was stretched senseless on his back. A spent bullet had taken him on the skull, and though it had glanced off, its impact had been sufficient to effectually quieten his wandering wits.

A shock may dull the senses, a shock may quicken them to life. When Neil Darroch regained consciousness, he was no longer the same man who had groped his way clear of the French army, more by luck than good guidance. He found himself lying in a grass field, his face turned up to the sky, while his head throbbed, and there was crusted blood amongst his hair.

He was bewildered to find himself in a uniform, wounded, and lying out in the open amongst a patch of long rank grass, brown and sere, which had escaped the sickle. He had been wakened by the splashing of heavy rain-drops on his upturned face. A thunder-shower, almost tropical in violence, was pouring in

sheets upon the parched ground. Masses of black cloud obscured the sun, and heaven's artillery was rumbling, and now and then crashing out in startling peals.

The storm which burst over the combatants in the cavalry charge at Genappe had travelled south, and was now deluging the deserted field of Quatre Bras and the heights of Frasne.

Neil Darroch staggered to his feet, sick and faint; but his memory had returned to him, save that all which had happened since the fatal night in the house of the conspirators was a blank.

He remembered only too clearly how Gironde had fallen, the terrible accident which had made an end of the friendly little Gascon. He groaned as he thought of it, and then stared dully about him.

Where was he now? How came he to be dressed like a French infantryman of the line? Surely he must be dreaming! But no, he was in a hollow with a steep slope on one side of him and a more gradual ascent on the other. The grass around was trampled as though by many feet, but nothing living was in sight. There was something horrible in this uncertainty.

How long was it since he had dashed forward to catch the senseless form of the one man who had proved himself a friend indeed, and whom he had killed? Yes, killed, however unwittingly. He buried his aching head in his hands, and summoned all his energies in a desperate endeavour to bridge the gap. It was in vain. He must have been mad—he had heard of such things. And what then? He had perhaps enlisted—become the grenadier the Emperor had called him. But he was wounded. Had there been a battle? had he been left as dead?

He cried aloud in his misery of thought. What fate was this which had befallen him?

Unable to remain still, he set off at a hurried walk,

striding aimlessly up the more gentle slope, which was laid out in fields, dotted with trees and streaked by hedges. The rain soaked him, but he heeded it not. The air was close and steamy. It was evidently late in the day.

As a matter of fact, it was already growing dark. He had lain for hours where the bullet had stretched him out, and the French army had swept past him in pursuit of the allied forces, which were falling back on Waterloo. Hidden by the long grass, none had noticed him, as he had fallen considerably to the right of the route followed by the main body of Ney's battalions.

Soon he could no longer doubt that his suppositions were correct. He came upon a pool of water, and lying at its edge was the body of a man in the uniform of the chasseurs à cheval. His head was hidden beneath the surface. It was plain that he had been wounded, and had crawled here to die. A little further and he was amongst more corpses, dead bodies of men and horses in every attitude it is possible to conceive.

He went from one to another, and then suddenly he gave a choking cry, and came to a dead halt. At his feet lay a Scottish Highlander, his bare knees sticking up from the kilt folds, both his hands still gripping a musket by the barrel. Three French soldiers of the line, their heads battered out of all shape, lay around him. He had died hard, this Celt, and he seemed to know it, for the rain-drops pattered down upon a grinning face.

Neil Darroch, however, scarcely noticed this. It was the dress, the tartan, which fascinated him. Here, at last, was a countryman of his own, one of the Highland Brigade. He stooped over him, and read his number. It was the 92nd. The man was a Gordon.

'God help me!' muttered Neil. 'I have been fighting against my own folk.' With a couple of quick

jerks he tore the coarse epaulettes from his shoulders, and trampled them under foot.

'I have been mad!' he moaned. 'I have been mad all these long months, and this is a judgment upon me.'

A hundred memories crowded upon his disordered brain—memories of his old home, the great lone hills, the surf-beat of the western sea on the Croban, and the sandy bay of Shiachan. He had fancied he was an Ishmael amongst men—a man without a country or a people, but he could no longer deceive himself. The blood of his race was too strong for him. He might be partly French by descent, but he was a Darroch—a Darroch and a Scot.

A new idea occurred to him. Perhaps he had paid his debt to Jules Gironde, to the cheery little spy who had been so anxious that he should serve Napoleon. But he could not bear to think of his dead comrade. He cursed himself for a murderer, and swearing loudly in his frenzy, he started off again. As his excitement lessened, however, he became conscious of his soaking clothes. He was drenched to the skin, and the storm showed no signs of abating, though the thunder had rolled away to the east to mutter and crash over another battle-field. There was a house near him, standing all by itself in a garden full of fruit-trees and flowers. The latter had been crushed into the soil, for this was the very position which the 92nd had carried at the bayonet as they charged from the ditch on the Namur road.

The dead did not lie so thickly here. The burial parties had been busy the night before—busiest where death had been busiest also. The glass of the windows was shattered, the door hung open, half wrenched from its hinges, there were bullet-marks where the lead had splashed upon the walls.

Neil entered, and stumbling along a passage, passed into a room. A gruesome sight greeted him. The place had been the kitchen of the house, and through its low latticed window a faint stream of lurid light

poured, the last gleam of an angry sun which had forced its way through the murky clouds and the raindrops. A table lay upon its side, dishes were scattered on the floor, the dresser broken, the whole room in a wild disorder.

In a corner, with his back to the wall, sat a gigantic Highlander, one of the biggest men Neil Darroch had ever seen. He was in a horrid mess, a great flap of his scalp hanging down over one ear, where a sabre-cut had sheared to the bone. A bullet had passed through his abdomen, but he was still alive. His face, that of a man about the middle age, was ashen, with dark circles about his eyes; but the eyes themselves were bright and feverish.

'So here's another!' he cried feebly as Neil entered. 'You need not be scared, my mannie. Nat Gordon could not hurt a fly. He'll be posted as missing, bless your heart! A queer death for a gentleman, in a hole like this. Ay, ay, I'm a private, a —— private, but cousin to a duke for all that!'

He laughed shrilly.

'What do you want?' he asked. 'Curse you, but I'll have to give you the French, and my wits are going. I'm cold in the legs; when it gets up here'—he patted his chest lightly—'I'll be missing: a queer death for a gentleman. Steady! So ho, my boy!' he called out as Neil lurched up against the opposite wall. 'Seems to me we'll go out together. Answer to the roll-call in French, ye devil!'

'I'm a Scot like yourself,' said Neil hoarsely.

'God keep ye from being like me!' said the other solemnly; 'but what are ye doing in a swallow-tail and gaiters? We must rig ye out, ye damned deserter, or they'll have ye at the drum-head in the morning—ay, in the morning, when I'll be missing. They wanted to carry me off, but I wouldn't trouble the lads. I didn't think I'd last, and it's no joke being whummled when there's a hole through ye.'

'Can I help you?' asked Neil, shuddering as he

stared at this wreck of a man who made a jest of his sufferings.

'No, no, my mannie. The thirst's gone, and so's the pain, and so will be Nat Gordon in a wee while—a wee while.'

His voice had grown weaker and his head dropped. Neil Darroch sat down and watched him.

An hour passed. The room was darkening, and there was no sound but the constant drip of the water-drops and the laboured breathing of the man in front of him.

Neil Darroch had much to ask him, but bided his time. He was content to wait; for when next the Highlander opened his eyes he was quite sensible, though his voice had grown weaker.

'Quick!' said Neil; 'tell me, there has been a battle?'

'A bit of a tulzie,' said the soldier with a wan smile. He spoke like a gentleman and gazed curiously at Neil.

'The French won?'

'The French! Excuse me, sir, but are you not a French officer?'

'No, no,' answered Neil. 'My story is too long to tell you; I'm a countryman of your own.'

'Indeed, it's pleasant to have kith and kin about ye at the bitter end. I have been off my head all day I think, though I heard the French passing.'

'They won, then?'

'Not the battle of yesterday. But we were to fall back on Waterloo if the Prussians were beaten.'

'And where may that be?'

'It's on the Brussels road, straight to the rear of this. If ye want to join the army, ye'll have to go round about and look out for French troops coming across country. We heard their cannon away to the east. It'll be a good twenty miles of a tramp, I should say, but I'll never cover it.'

He looked wistfully towards the window.

'It grows dark,' he muttered—'dark and very cold.'

'Can I do anything for you?' asked Neil.

'I've been a fool all my life,' said the man, as if he had not heard him.

He closed his eyes. A grayness began to creep over his face. Suddenly he struggled up and sat erect without support.

'Hist!' he whispered. 'They're yonder, all that's left of them, and they want the flank man of my company.'

He clutched Neil's arm with fingers which were already stiffening.

'Will you go for me?' he cried, turning his glazing eyes on Neil's face, his lips working convulsively; 'Ye'll find them on the left. Swear you will go for me, or I'll be posted as missing.'

'I swear,' said Neil Darroch solemnly.

* * * * *

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the next day that the sound of the cannonade which announced the attack upon Hougoumont struck faintly on the ears of a man who, from sheer exhaustion, had thrown himself down on the ground some miles to the eastward of the village of Ohain. He wore a French infantry dress minus the epaulettes, and carried with him a musket and the blood-stained uniform of a private in the 92nd regiment of British foot. He had been on the march all night, stumbling along the muddy lanes which led northward from the river Dyle past the hamlets of Seroulx and St. Lambert. Twice he had watched columns of men swing past him, heading to the east, and had shaped his course accordingly. He had begged for food at an isolated farmhouse, and its mistress had been gracious to him, though a trifle alarmed at the wild look in the man's eyes, and the grim, stern aspect of his face. Neil Darroch was doing penance. He had no compass, and it was a wonder he had got so near the left

of the British position as he had done; but he had still a long way to go. He would fain have rested, but the fever in his brain urged him to fresh efforts.

He rose and set off in the direction of the cannonade. The rain-clouds were dispersing; there was a gleam of watery sunlight and every promise of a fine day. As he pressed on, the din in front of him grew louder; he could distinguish the rattle of musketry volleys mingling with the heavy boom of field artillery. He kept away to his right. The country was well wooded. He struck a cross road and advanced rapidly. Presently he met a peasant from whom he learned that he was heading directly for the left of the British position; that a few miles in front was a village occupied by the allied troops. He inquired its name; it was Papelotte.

Though his ideas were still confused, though he was still in a kind of frenzy, there was a strange method about all his actions. He questioned the rustic closely, and though the man was frightened at his appearance, and kept glancing fearfully at his musket, he seemed to answer truthfully and to the best of his ability. Neil Darroch therefore retired into a patch of trees as soon as his informant was out of sight, and shortly emerged in the uniform he had taken from the body of the Gordon. He had the height but not the bulk of the dead Highlander, and the tunic hung loosely on him. A cloth was bound about his head, which was burning hot, and there were great blood-stains on the white facings and the red cloth, and on the green tartan of the kilt. But Neil Darroch scarcely noticed them. He had been a traitor to his country, he told himself. No thought of England, of the scars upon his back, now crossed his mind. He had sworn to take the dead man's place and he would fulfil his vow. The idea had taken firm hold of his disordered brain. Thus, and thus alone, could he atone for the past.

It was an hour after mid-day ere he drew near

the village. He could no longer doubt that a great battle was in progress. The discharge of cannon was incessant; he could hear the sharper explosion of shells, the crash of volleys, and the shouts and cries of the combatants. Faster and faster he hurried forward, and now he was amongst the outposts, men of the regiment of Nassau. He passed them, leaving them staring in wonder at him; but they had no time to question him, for a dropping fire was already beginning from behind the hedges and enclosures. There was a little knoll beyond a farmhouse, and he gained its summit. At once there was disclosed to his view the greater part of the field of Waterloo.

On a long slope away to the south were dark masses of troops, the sunlight flashing from the steel points amongst them, glancing from burnished cuirass and helmet in a thousand sparkles. This line of elevated ground was the French position, and its left was shrouded in drifting smoke, where the batteries were covering yet another fierce assault on Hougoumont, wrapped likewise in rolling, sulphurous clouds. The plain between Hougoumont and the height was full of men, the light troops advancing to the attack. The roll of drums came distinctly to Neil Darroch's ears as he stood motionless, staring at the scene.

The plain, in reality a shallow valley, was clear, grass-covered, and gently undulating from the line of the Charleroi and Brussels road to the villages of Papelotte and Smohain, which lay just below it and to the south. Very nearly in a direct line with the mound on which he was posted stretched the crest of the slope which formed the Allies' position. Behind him, on a level plateau, were cavalry, the light horse of Vivian and Vandeleur. To the right of these stood masses of men clad in some dark uniform. They were Vincke's and Best's brigades; but Neil had no eyes for them. Beyond these, and partly hidden by them, were columns in red, and stretch-

ing from the latter away to the west he could mark the front of the British lines.

About their centre, in front of it, and therefore on the southern aspect of the slope, and reaching down to the hollow, was a clump of wood. It marked the position of La Haye Sainte; he could plainly see the farm-buildings. The right of the Allied position, like the French left which it approached, separated from it by little more than the lands of Hougoumont, was enveloped in smoke, and from it came the distant roar of artillery, and the ceaseless report of a brisk musketry fire.

It takes long to tell, but the whole prospect was suddenly presented to Neil's astonished gaze. He saw at once what was proceeding; he knew at once what he must do. Turning, he began to run in a direction which would bring him between the light horse and the infantry brigades nearest him.

As he hurried on, his musket at the trail, his bayonet fixed, a mounted officer dashed up to him.

'What are you doing here, my man?' he cried.

Neil made no answer.

'Great Heavens!' said the officer. 'You must be a straggler from Quatre Bras—92nd is it? That's Pack's brigade. They're yonder on the left, behind and to the right of the Hanoverians and those d——d Belgians.'*

'Ay,' said Neil quickly, 'they're on the left. I was to find them on the left.'

'And so you will, my lad; and you're just in time for the fun. Yonder they come. Thunder! what a sight!'

Well might he say so. As Neil hastened off in the direction indicated, a course which carried him away from the summit of the ridge, and down the very gentle incline of its northern face, so concealing

* The officer was in error. The Dutch Belgians formed Bylandt's brigade, considerably to the right, and somewhat in advance of the other troops.

from his view the open plain and what was occurring there, the Emperor launched his great assault on the Allied left and centre.

Vast columns of infantry crowned the French ridge and swung down the slope, their drums beating the charge, their shouts rending the sky till drowned by the terrific report of four-and-seventy cannon, which hurtled their iron hail over the heads of the attacking force, playing with deadly effect on the advanced Allied troops.

The conformation of the ground sheltered him from the artillery fire, which was playing havoc amongst the faint-hearts of Bylandt's brigade. He heard their cries as they broke and fled the moment the French columns came within musketry range. He heard also the yells and hootings of the enraged British soldiery as the rabble poured past them, but Pack's battalions intervened between him and the fugitives. He came first upon an English regiment, the 44th, but an officer, labouring under great excitement, cried out to know what the devil he was doing there, and pointed to where, in a thin double line, stood a Highland regiment.

It was the 92nd. A hundred yards or so in front of them was a hedge, behind them, and considerably to their right rear, a body of red-coated dragoons on gray horses. The men of the 44th, recognising in this tall, gaunt, wounded Highlander a relic of the fierce contest of two days before, cheered him loudly as he passed in front of them and between the rear ranks of Best's Hanoverians.

Neil Darroch never heard them, for at that moment from beyond the crest of the ridge sounded loud shouts, and immediately the front files came bursting through the hedge.

'Vive l'Empereur!' they cried; and again, 'En avant! En avant!' but their leaders halted them to give them time to re-form.

Just then a horseman—it was Pack himself—spurred

along in front of the Gordons—of the 230 men who were all that were left of the 92nd, and who were to face 2,000, amongst whom was borne the eagle of 'The Invincibles.'

'Ninety-second, you must charge. All in front of you have given way!' cried the General, waving his cocked hat as a signal.

A mighty cheer answered him, and loud and clear rang out the war-pipes as the double line of kilted men sprang forward.

Crash! A rolling fire burst from the column in front, now in perfect order, but on swept the Highlanders.

The French lines wavered. They seemed struck with fear at the grim, silent advance of this strangely clad infantry, with their huge feather bonnets and swinging tartans. But now they were no longer silent. They poured in a volley at thirty yards, and the bristling line of bayonets sank to the charge. With another cheer they hurled themselves like one of their own raging torrents upon the foe. But what noise was this, swelling in volume till the air was full of it?—a sound like distant thunder, or a breaking sea, the hoof-strokes of four hundred horse.

The Greys were coming. They had passed rapidly through the infantry to the right, and were now in the open, gathering way, rushing to the aid of their countrymen.

'Open oot, lads! for God's sake, open oot!' yelled the sergeants, as they saw behind them a whirlwind of gray and scarlet, of great black busbies and glittering steel. In a moment it was upon them—the huge, dapple-hided, heavy-limbed chargers, with necks outstretched, blood-streaked eyes, and spreading nostrils; the troopers, red-faced and drunk with the battle fever, rising for the downward cut, or sitting firm for the shock.

As they passed, out rang the slogan of the North. 'Scotland for ever!' shouted horse and foot, and

crashed together on the broken, swaying front of the columns of Marcognet.

Neil Darroch had gone with the Gordons, running full speed in rear of them, seeing nothing but a red mist, hearing nothing but the snarling bray of the pipes.

The Highlanders were seizing the stirrup-leathers. Neil Darroch did likewise as a trooper sped past him, a man whose teeth were set, who went gladly seeking death, and never looked at the Gordon who was clinging to his horse.

Then came a period of wild confusion, of gallant deeds and gallant deaths; but the vast unwieldy mass of infantry, hampered and pierced to its core, gave way on every side.

Through and through them drove the heavy dragoons, and, dashing across an intervening space, plunged madly into the supports. A spluttering fire broke from the outer files, and many a horse was riderless and many a trooper horseless; but the impetus was tremendous, the force of the charge irresistible. Whole ranks were driven back and crushed to the earth, the columns tottered and reeled and then sank, defeated, overwhelmed. The division of Marcognet was a mere rabble, but the victorious Greys away out in the plain, scattered and exhausted, were at the mercy of the French lancers and chasseurs.

While the dragoons ploughed their way through the hapless infantry, where veterans were vainly sacrificing themselves to gain room, where Sergeant Vichery yielded up the ghost, split from skull-cap to chin by the famous Ewart in the struggle for the eagle, Neil caught sight of the face of the man who rode beside him. Changed though it was, lean, careworn, and now lighted up by the mad lust of fighting, he recognised it, and cried out in his astonishment. It was the face of his brother, that brother who had wronged him, with whom he had a long account to settle. The trooper glanced down at him.

'Are you wounded?' he shouted. 'I can't hold the brute; he's got the bit, and is fairly off. You had better let go.'

He turned to slash at a fierce little man who poked his bayonet at him, and whose head he cleft as he would have cleft an orange.

Neil Darroch still clung on desperately. A wild thought had come into his mind—to make a thrust at the broad back above him. It passed instantly. He must bide his time; he was not an assassin; that time was coming. They were now out on the plain. The horse, maddened with pain and excitement, careered towards the batteries, yet Neil kept pace with it, sustained by the same fiery, restless spirit which had possessed him ever since he came to his senses on the field of Quatre Bras.

But a bullet from one of the fugitives did what its rider could not do. The charger sprang convulsively into the air, pitched forward on its head, and, as Neil Darroch leapt clear, rolled heavily on its side, pinning its rider beneath it.

The dragoon groaned heavily: his leg was fractured at the thigh, his foot crushed and useless. As he opened his eyes and realized his position, he became aware of a man bending over him, whose head was bound about with a bloody cloth, whose face, haggard and dirty, yet seemed familiar.

'Never mind me,' said Geoffrey in a low voice; 'the French will be on you if you don't look out. Save yourself while you can.'

By way of answer the man began to drag him free. So exquisite was the torture his mangled limb gave him that he fainted. When he came to himself he was on the Highlander's back, being carried slowly towards the rear. Suddenly the man laid him down and stood over him with his bayonet at the charge.

A gray-haired officer of French chasseurs came galloping towards them. He was a very fine man, with a heavy moustache and a pointed beard.

As he reached them a curious smile and a look of admiration passed over his face. With a bow and a wave of his hand he sped on, and quickly overtook a dragoon, whose horse was blown, and whom he despatched with ease, only to receive a bullet through his own head five minutes later from a crippled Gordon, who lay quietly behind a dead charger, and chuckled grimly as he saw the effect of his shot.

As Neil Darroch stooped to again raise his brother, Geoffrey seized his arm, and stared eagerly, wonderingly, at his face.

'It is you!' he gasped. 'Thank God you are not dead!'

'And no thanks to you,' said Neil fiercely. 'You shall yet answer to me for your work!'

The other, who had started up, sank back.

'I have answered for it already,' he moaned. 'My life has been a hell on earth. Leave me to die and save yourself.'

'Never!' cried Neil Darroch, and, again stooping, raised him and began his retreat.

It was too late. A troop of lancers caught sight of them, and with loud shouts bore down at full speed, their gay pennons fluttering, their shouts of triumph coming shrilly to his ears.

Neil Darroch gave one glance around him. There was rescue at hand: the light horse of Vandeleur was advancing on the right, more British cavalry were sweeping down the slope to take the lancers on the flank, but there was no help for him unless he left Geoffrey to his fate.

'So this is the end,' he muttered; and taking steady aim, dropped one of the Lancers from his saddle.

Another moment and they were upon him. For a few seconds there was a confused group of men and horses, a clashing of steel, an oath or two in French, and the troop, with another vacant saddle and a

man bent in agony upon his crupper, dashed onward, and were rolled up and swept away by Ponsonby's dragoons.

Out in the open lay two men, the one a mass of wounds, the other killed by a lance thrust.

Such was Neil Darroch's revenge.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER MANY DAYS

UPON Craspinat's body, scarce more hideous in death than it had been in life, were found the missing papers. This at first was looked upon as an additional proof of Kate Ingleby's guilt, and she was immediately arrested, though her behaviour on the terrible night when the house was surrounded and stormed was somewhat puzzling to her captors. In the confusion consequent upon the death of Gironde she might have escaped. None had paid any attention to her. Indeed, when they came to look about them, she had disappeared; but to their surprise they speedily found her again. Stunned by grief and horror, she had slipped away to the room where at last Monsieur Deschamps was drawing near an end of all his troubles. He had been growing feebler day by day without any apparent cause. His mind was dead, his body dying, slowly and painlessly. Presently, as she watched him, his old puckered face, now almost devoid of expression, wrinkled into a vague flickering smile. He struggled up in bed and sat with a hand behind his ear in the attitude of one who listens. His smile increased. It was plain that he heard something very pleasing. As he listened he began to beat time—a short, stately measure—with the forefinger of his other hand.

Though the girl knew it not, he was conducting an

orchestra which was playing that quaint tinkling music of the minuet composed a century and more before by King Louis XIII.

His movement ceased. A heavy tear, which had gathered on his drooping, reddened under-lid, trickled slowly down his furrowed cheek, but he did not look sad. Indeed, he gave a sigh of great content.

'C'est paradis,' he muttered; 'mai oui, c'est paradis,' and began to drag the bedclothes about him with feeble hands; but as Kate leaned forward to help him, her own face wet, the change came, and Charles Deschamps passed gladly to his rest.

By his side they found Kate Ingleby; and though they were rough men, but lately full of fight and ready for a desperate struggle, she had no reason to complain of their behaviour.

'It is la belle Americaine!' they whispered. 'Can she be guilty?' And they shook their heads.

For all that, it might have gone hard with the girl had not the notary come to the rescue. He heard of the finding of his late client's papers, and the management of Emile d'Herbois' affairs meant money to him. He had a wife and family, both small, but none the less exacting, and so he bestirred himself. Not only so, but the girl's misfortunes moved him to pity. He was a Frenchman, and he had a heart. Moreover, he had a very smart brain when he cared to tax it to the full, and Kate, anxious as to Neil Darroch's fate, and realizing that she had misjudged her uncle, now confided in his lawyer, and with the instinct of a true business woman, promised to retain his services.

He very soon found that there was absolutely no proof against her, and began instituting such searching inquiries that the Minister of Police, who was already busy intriguing with the Bourbons, was but too glad to accede to his demand for a release.

The first use Kate Ingleby made of her freedom was to employ the notary, and as much money as by

the terms of her uncle's will she could command, in a search for Neil Darroch, who she found passed under the name of Noël Deschamps, and had been sent to the front in the charge of a certain Sergeant Vichery, attached to a regiment in D'Erlon's corps.

This was all, and the man of law shook his head, especially when the news arrived of the great defeat, the hurried flight, and the advance on Paris.

But Kate was determined. It would be the basest ingratitude, she told herself, to make no effort to rescue the man who was suffering for her sake. Her heart told her a great deal more, but she would not listen to its promptings. Besides, a great fear possessed her, for the turnkey at the Temple had dilated upon his prisoner's peculiar condition of mind.

In spite of considerable difficulty, Kate and her adviser managed to leave Paris, and began a weary search, and, as the notary remarked testily, one utterly hopeless.

'Hopeless?' answered Kate; 'it cannot be until we find that he is dead. Stay at home, if you are afraid, but I am going.'

And the man of law, wondering if all American women were so constituted, and thanking his guardian saint that he did not practise in the young republic, had perforce to follow her.

It was a remarkable but not unnatural coincidence that, while Kate Ingleby and the notary were on the track of Neil Darroch, a certain solicitor of Glasgow, to wit, Mr. Benjamin Quill, senior partner of the firm of Quill and Driver, should have arrived in Belgium in pursuit of Neil's step-brother.

This energetic little lawyer, however, had been much disturbed in mind. After a most unpleasant journey, he had arrived at Shiachan, to find Darroch's house a smouldering mass of ruins, and a very strange story going the round of the fishermen.

'Preposterous!' Mr. Quill had said, jerking with both hands at the collar of his bottle-green coat; but that did not help him much.

There was no Geoffrey Darroch to be found, Neil Darroch had vanished, and yet Mr. Quill had a considerable amount of business to arrange; for the old Jacobite had been miserly, in addition to his other virtues, and had left his younger grandson a very fair sum of money, obtained, as Mr. Quill remarked jocosely and in strict confidence to Mrs. Quill, by the sweat of other men's brows.

In whatever way it was amassed, it was yet Mr. Quill's duty to find the heir; and being an elder of the kirk and exceedingly conscientious, and being, moreover, in need of a change of air after his illness, he forthwith set off for London, whither he found, after much anxious inquiry at Portroy and elsewhere, Geoffrey Darroch had betaken himself. Mr. Quill was dry and brown, like the sherry which was his favourite tipple, but he had the essence of a first-rate detective in him. Although, being well versed in his Bible, he knew to what extremes of wickedness a man may venture, and with what interest his sins may recoil upon his head, he was yet considerably shocked to learn of Geoffrey Darroch's miserable excesses.

He traced him, step by step, to his enlistment in the Royal Scots Greys, and his departure with that regiment for the seat of war. Then Mr. Quill proceeded to cross the Channel for the last time, as he told himself when half-way to Dunkirk, till he remembered it would be again necessary to face the sea, and probably in a double sense, if Mrs. Quill and the young Quills were ever to be transported with joy by the sight of his pepper-and-salt whiskers. Whereupon Benjamin Quill groaned, and resigned himself to the inevitable.

A man lay in a crowded hospital in Brussels who was a puzzle to many people. He puzzled the

surgeons by recovering in spite of their assurances to the contrary; he had puzzled the orderlies by the fact that, though wearing a badly fitting uniform of the 92nd Highlanders, his boots were those of a French infantryman. He puzzled those who nursed him by raving constantly in French, with the exception of the repeated utterance in English of a few names, amongst them a woman's. Still more he puzzled the surviving sergeants and corporals of the Gordons, who, at the time he was found lying across the dead body of Trooper Darroch of the Greys, one and all vowed that he was not on the roll-call of the regiment. Some regarded him as a deserter from the French lines, but none knew anything for certain till he came to his senses, weak as a babe, but out of danger.

Then the kindly Bible-reader, bit by bit, got his story from him, and was more than astonished. His Scotch grew broader and broader as he asked question after question, and he finally shocked himself by making use of some very strong language. He was shocked, but much relieved. Then he set himself to work to comfort this sufferer, who, he saw, was a strong man broken, in whom he discerned a proud spirit crushed. And his efforts were not unsuccessful, though for a time Neil Darroch was full of remorse.

'There is no pardon for me,' he said. 'I harboured vengeance to the very end.'

'Hoots!' rejoined the other; 'ye're haverin, man. I'm telt ye carried this same scoondrel o' a step-brither to the rear on your back, and they say ye stood ower him wi' the bayonet fixed, till ye couldna stand ony mair. If that's no gude for evil, what is, sir, I wad like to ken?'

And then came the confession. It had been done to save Geoffrey for another meeting.

'Then, thank God! it canna be,' said the old reader, and neither blamed nor excused, for he knew that the gaunt, bloodless man before him had not been in

his right mind for many a day. But he had no fear for his reason now.

What pained him was to see that Neil Darroch, having struggled back to saneness and some measure of health, made no further effort. He lay dreamily on his back, languid and without desire.

Therefore, when the reader learned that a most inquisitive little man had been making inquiries after Trooper Darroch, who lay under the sod on the battle-field, he went with all haste to the hotel at which Mr. Quill resided, and caught the worthy solicitor on the eve of departure.

'Preposterous!' the latter exclaimed when he heard the tale, but would have gone to see the patient at once had he not been absolutely forbidden to go near him for a week.

'A sudden shock might finish him,' said the surgeon; and though Mr. Quill, having heard the reader's story, did not believe much in the surgeon, he had nothing for it but to obey.

In the meantime there arrived in Brussels another lawyer, with a lady in his company—a girl with a very fair but a very sad face. Kate Ingleby had not gone hither and thither amongst the retreating French troops for nothing. The scenes she witnessed were to be graven in her memory for ever.

But she found no trace of Neil Darroch. At last, in despair, she journeyed to Brussels, and began making inquiries amongst the numerous French wounded and amongst the prisoners.

While she did so she stayed at the hotel to which Mr. Quill had extended his patronage, and along with not a few he became interested in the beautiful American.

When he heard Kate Ingleby's mission—she made no secret of it—his surprise may be imagined.

'Preposterous!' he exclaimed, with such a jerk that his coat-collar gave way at the back and he well-nigh forgot his eldership.

It did not take long to exchange confidences, and then Mr. Quill, his face radiant, his coat mended by Kate Ingleby herself, much to her notary's disgust, went off to inform the Bible-reader. That kindly old man breathed a prayer of thankfulness and gave the surgeon a bit of his mind. As a result, it was Mr. Quill's turn to be disgusted; for the American girl was admitted to see Mr. Darroch even before his legal adviser.

'Preposterous!' said Mr. Quill, but very mildly, and wiped his spectacles. He explained to the French notary in what he took to be French that it was wonderful how moisture deposited upon glass in the heat of a Continental summer, and the notary bowed, as wise as he had been before.

The old Scotchman had prepared his patient for the interview, and had seen the momentary gleam in his eyes, the flush come to his cheek. But when the girl entered, eager, trembling, Neil Darroch lay calm and impassive. He was making a last effort to be like his old self.

'You are better?' she said softly. 'You will get well?'

'Hoots, ay!' said the Bible-reader, and discreetly withdrew.

'Maybe,' said Neil, and she noticed how weak was his voice—'maybe; but I have not much to live for.'

'That is not true,' said Kate.

He looked at her with dull eyes, in which, however, there was a question.

'Yes,' she answered gaily, though God knows her heart was sad at sight of him, 'though you may do things unintentionally, I guess I do not. I came here to find you, and I have found you, and I am not going to lose you now.'

'Kate!' he said hoarsely—'Miss Ingleby I mean—it cannot be. Do you know I have been flogged with the cat, that it was my bullet which struck down Gironde—unintentionally, it is true, but none the

less mine? Do you know that I have fought against my own folk, that I have been a traitor, that I am an outcast?'

'Yes, yes,' she said; 'I know all there is to know, and this is my answer.'

She bent over him and kissed him on the forehead.

His thin hand lying on the sheet trembled, but his mouth was still stern.

'It may not be,' he said.

'What is your reason now, most quibbling of men?' she asked, with a merry laugh.

He was yielding; she saw it, she knew it.

'Do you think,' he said slowly and painfully, 'that I could do so mean a thing as this? You are rich again, I am a beggar; you are——'

'Is that all?' she interposed; 'tell me truly, is that all?'

'I suppose so,' he answered, 'but it is enough.'

'Is it, though?' she said lightly, and rising, opened the door, looked out into the passage, and beckoned with her finger.

There entered Mr. Quill.

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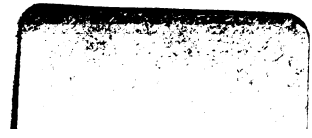
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